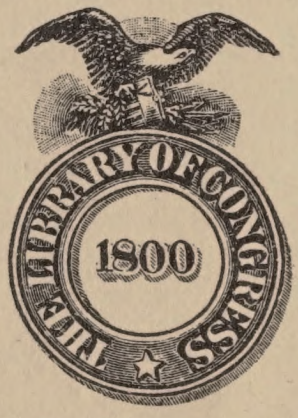
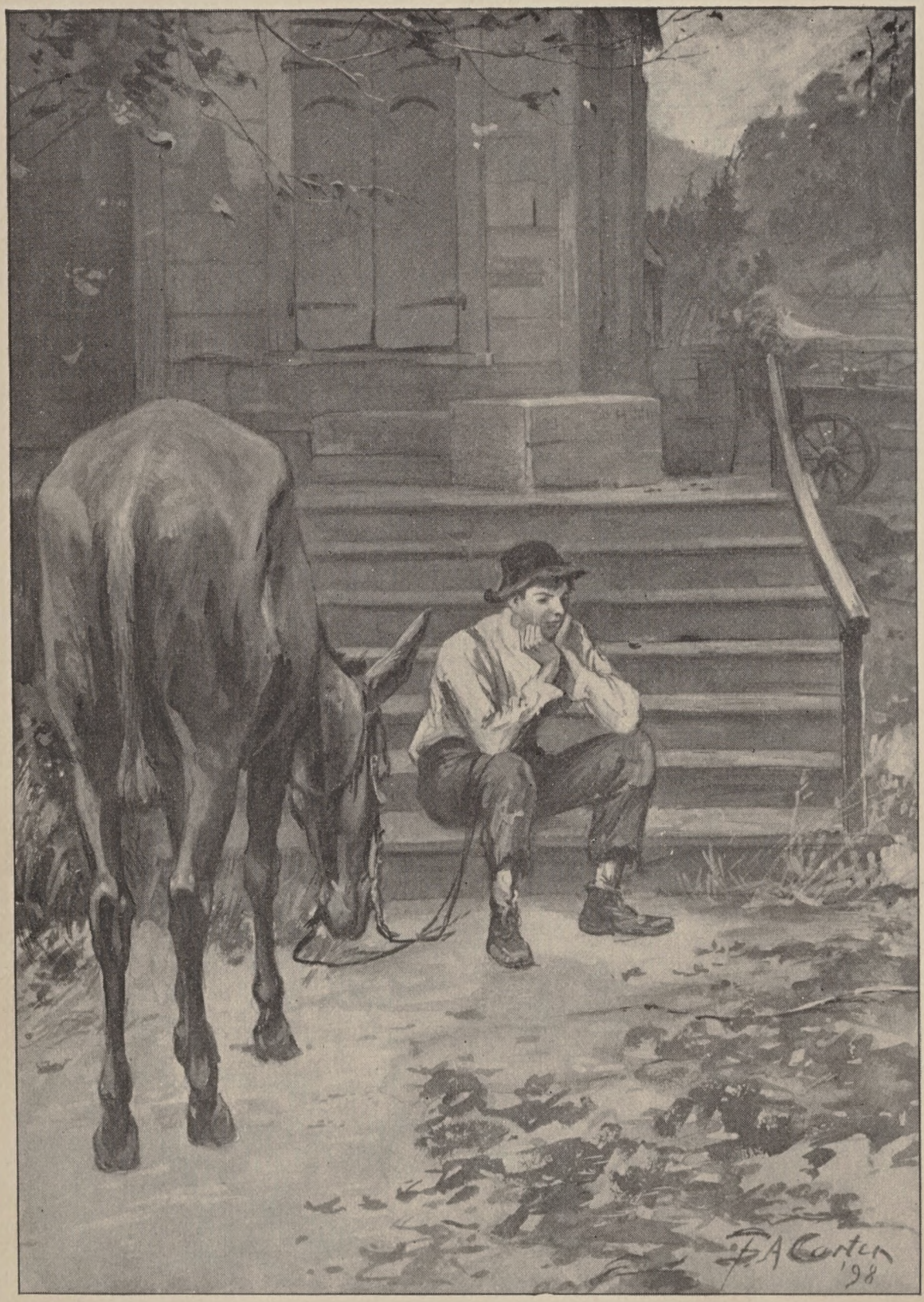


Class PZ3

Book D836M

Copyright No.

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.



HE WAS SITTING ON THE STEPS OF THE UNOPENED STORE
(Page 7)

A MOONSHINER'S SON

4955
841

BY

WILL ALLEN DROMGOOLE

Author of "The Heart of Old Hickory," "The Valley Path," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY F. A. CARTER

THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA MDCCCXCVIII

.D836M

12615

COPYRIGHT 1898 BY THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
OFFICE OF
AUG - 5 1898
Register of Copyrights.

TWO COPIES RECEIVED.

4652.0

Aug. 5. 98

2nd COPY,
1898.

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	The Settlement Store	7
II	A Signal and a Warning	22
III	It Was Grim Who Told	66
IV	A Raid	85
V	The Moonshiner's Home	104
VI	Behind the Rainbow Falls	128
VII	The Best of Friends Must Part	142
VIII	Sylvia	164
IX	The Belated Old Stage Coach	178
X	Under the Doorstep	190
XI	Confessions	206
XII	Among New Scenes	222
XIII	First Lessons	246
XIV	The Wonderful Shops	261
XV	Progress—Changes	286
XVI	After Many Days	320

A MOONSHINER'S SON

CHAPTER I

THE SETTLEMENT STORE

No man on the mountain was more respected than old Jube Jarvis, the settlement storekeeper. But to no one was he quite such a hero as to the boy sitting on the step of the unopened store, in the dawn of a crisp September morning, waiting for the owner of the establishment to come from the house across the road and "open up."

He was a young fellow of not more than twelve or fourteen years perhaps, yet there was an old look in his face that told of troubles that never should have knocked at the door of youth. The old-young face was crowned by a mass of reddish-brown hair that showed a golden tinge

when the sun fell full upon it; as though nature, of her kindness, would have poured some of her own good warmth into his chilled little body.

There was an uncovered porch before the door, and a long step that led down into the public road. The boy was seated upon the step, face in his palms, elbows upon his knees, lost in thought.

Before him, contentedly cropping the crisping blades of grass, stood a gray mule without saddle or blanket, her bridle-rein lying lightly across the knee of her young rider. Now and then the boy put out his hand and stroked the short, glossy neck of the animal, at which she would leave off grazing for a moment to rub her nose affectionately against the well-patched knees of her master. Evidently mule and master were on the best of terms.

Sometimes, too, the boy would rouse up from his dreamings and call out sharply: "Whoa thar, Kit."

And then the mule would regard him in a kind

of mild wonder, as though she said: "How could you think I would do such a thing?"

And it was a little singular that he should have suspected old Kit would be guilty of slipping off home and leaving her master to tramp it back to the cabin on the bluff, more than two miles distant.

Of a truth, the boy was not thinking of the mule at all, but of the storekeeper across the way. He was wondering how long it would be before he would "open up" the store.

And he was telling himself that he was "a great dunce for comin' thar afore day was fairly broke anyhow." And then he "allowed granny would be in and about done with her breakfast 'g'inst he could get back home." And while he was thinking thus the storekeeper chanced to look out of his window and see the forlorn-looking boy sitting there in the gray mists of the morning with the leaves of the big maple tree drifting down upon him like lumps of yellow gold, and what he said was: "Well, if thar ain't Joe Bentley!" A moment later he

stepped across the road and saluted his early customer.

"Mornin', Joe."

Joe bounded to his feet as though the voice of the storekeeper had sent new life surging through his frame.

"Mornin', Mr. Jarvis," said he. "I hope now I didn't wake you up, Mr. Jarvis."

The storekeeper thrust his iron key into the lock.

"Well," said he, "I had one eye open, so to speak. Folks all well, Joe?"

"Same as common, thank'e, sir," said Joe. "I reckon now I'm here toler'bly early, Mr. Jarvis, an' I ought to tell you why."

"Better hitch your mule first, Joe," said the merchant, with a sharp glance at the little old-young face that was telling him all too plainly that Joe was carrying an uncomfortable secret, and uncomfortable secrets were strictly forbidden at Jube Jarvis's establishment. The old man kept a sharp watch on the boy while he twisted his lines into the low, drooping branches

of the maple. There was that about Joe Bentley that had always appealed to childless Jube Jarvis. There was something in the boy, strong and staunch and true, that refused to yield itself to the unpromising surroundings among which fate had placed him. But could the old man have seen the broad black bruises laid upon the young shoulders under the coarse shirt which granny had darned and patched and spent many an hour trying to make look neat, the big heart of him would indeed have felt for ill-used Joe Bentley.

"Got no mammy, and worse than no pappy," grumbled the storekeeper, as he turned into the store, where Joe soon followed him.

"Well, son," said Mr. Jarvis, "something onusual must a-happened to fetch you out o' bed when other chaps the size o' you-uns air fairly knocking it off in sleep. What can I do for you, Joe?"

Joe leaned his patched elbow upon the counter and hesitated: how like begging his errand appeared now, after he had ridden so fast and

come so far to get it done. The merchant marked his hesitancy and said, encouragingly:

"Come, come now; I reckin it ain't anything to be so mightily ashamed on?"

"No, sir," said Joe. "It ain't anything to be ashamed on, I reckin. I have come over here to git one pound o' coffee for granny—"

The storekeeper dropped his right arm into the coffee barrel.

"Hold on thar, Mr. Jarvis," said Joe, "I allers aims to be forehanded an' honest, an' I'm obliged to tell you I ain't got any money to pay for it."

"Psher," remarked the merchant. "I reckin I ain't grown so close-fisted as I can't spare a pound o' coffee to an old woman like your granny. For I know mighty well it ain't for yourse'f you're wanting of it."

"No, sir," remarked Joe, "it's for granny. She don't appear to git on well without her cup o' mornin's. But she don't know I come for it, else she wouldn't a-let me. I slipped off. 'Pears

like I jest couldn't see her suffrin for her cup—" He stopped and his eyes filled.

"Psher," said the merchant, "what's a pound of coffee more or less. Hand me that thar scoop out o' the shot kaig, son."

But Joe shook his head:

"I couldn't take it that way," said he. "Granny'd send me straight back if I did. She'd allow it ware no more'n beggin'. An' she allows nobody has got the right to be a beggar who has got the strength to work. She allows that thar be a sort of fairness even in beggin', granny does. Besides, I aimed to give her the coffee, and I allowed may be you-uns would let me work it out. I could come straight back, soon's I fetched the coffee home for granny's breakfast. An' I'll work it out full and fair; 'deed I will, Mr. Jarvis."

The storekeeper stooped down and began scooping up the coffee: he did not measure it: there was no need to let the boy know that his order had been more than doubled. He would get full pay in work; he had tried Joe Bentley before.

"Whar'd you been, Joe," he asked while wrapping the coffee in a sheet of brown paper. "Whar'd you been so early of a mornin' on old Kit?" Joe dropped his head and was silent; he stood before his one friend the unmistakable image of guilty shame.

"Well, well," said Mr. Jarvis, "you needn't tell unless you air so minded, but let us hope it ware a healthy, lawful business you ware out upon. These air mighty rough times, Joe, an' a body's got to be watchful an' wary."

Joe lifted his head and looked the storekeeper squarely in the eye. He knew the old man allowed nobody to tell unlawful secrets in his house, and Joe half expected he might be kicked out, as he had seen big men kicked many a time, for attempting to make a confident of old Jube. Still, he meant to make an explanation.

"It ware not lawful," said he. "It ware wicked an' unlawful work, an' I knew it all the time. I ware holpin' to break the law. I tell you fair, Mr. Jarvis. I went—afore I came

over here—I went afore day, long afore day, to fetch a load—"

"Sh—h."

A shadow darkened the doorway, the shadow of a strange horse and rider. A man from one of the valley towns below, judging from his dress and appearance, had ridden up to the step and drawn rein. The storekeeper leaned across the counter and touched Joe's arm.

"Not a word more," said he, softly. "I don't want to hear a word about it. You can't allers tell what's a-goin' to happen, an' if anybody comes here inquirin' o' me consarnin' the rascality o' the kentry I ain't obligated to lie for nobody, an' I won't be. Now do you-uns run 'long home, an' take the nigh cut through the woods, an' don't you be a-talkin' too much, nuther."

He saw the gray mule trot off with her young rider before he returned to respond to the stranger's good morning.

"Mornin', stranger," said Jube, after which he went behind the counter and in his best

business manner said to the man who had followed him into the store:

"What can I do for you, stranger?"

"Why," laughed the visitor, "I think you can do a great deal. You see, my good friend—"

"My name be Jarvis," said the merchant.

"Well, Mr. Jarvis, I am on the track of a great rascal."

The merchant waved his hand, as though to take in the entire premises. "S'arch," said he. "I ain't concealin' nobody as air wanted, an' I ain't consortin' with rascals, as I knows on. S'arch the place if you're minded, stranger."

The strange man laughed again, lightly. "Oh, I'm not suspecting you," said he. As he spoke he threw back his coat; there was not a weapon in sight. The merchant noticed this, as the visitor intended he should. Revenue officers, as a general thing, came armed to the teeth, and under cover of darkness. Evidently this was not an officer, else he was one who had determined to avoid all the old subterfuges of

his predecessors. Or else, Jube thought, he must be a very ignorant young fellow to so daringly take his life in his own hands.

"I am not suspecting you. And, really, I am not exactly out upon a search to-day; but I saw that boy come out of here—"

The storekeeper held his breath; had Joe really got into some trouble, he wondered. He supposed the boy had merely wished to talk about his father, when he shut him up so unceremoniously. He didn't care to have Lige Bentley's illicit distilling thrust upon his confidence. True, he had suspicions, had had them all along; but suspicions were not facts. If Joe was in trouble, why, he was ready to help him if he could, though he was not ready to lie for him. He held that a man's first obligation is to his own honor, and that no man's safety should be purchased at the expense of one's own integrity. How he did hope that this man would ask no compromising questions.

"Do you know that boy?" was the first question put.

"Mighty well; knowed him nigh all his life; handy a chap as you ever see."

"I thought so," said the stranger. "That is, I thought he looked so. And that is what made me suspect—"

The merchant drew in his breath sharply and waited to hear more, the heart in his bosom beating like a trip-hammer until the stranger said:

"Now, do you think I could hire this boy for a day?"

"Hire him? That you couldn't; he's hired to me; he's got to keep store."

"Oh, and why didn't you say so at the first?"

"Why didn't you ax me? I answered you ever time you've put a question, an' answered you truthful, stranger."

The man withdrew without another word; he flung himself into the saddle and gave the reins a jerk that sent his big bay spinning out into the road. Suddenly he whirled, and called to the old man standing in the doorway:

"See here, my friend, I guess you'd best not mention my having been here."

"All right, I won't, onless some one should ax me. If they ax they git the truth, let 'em hail from whar they will," and with a sigh of relief the storekeeper returned to his boxes and barrels.

But he was ill at ease; something, he felt, was afoot; trouble was brewing for somebody, and he felt a vague fear that somehow Joe was not to escape.

For a long time the country around had been infested with illicit distillers; now and then during later years there had been a raid, more or less successful; but for the most part the "wildcatters," as they were called, or "moonshiners," were too wary, and too well shielded, by the inaccessible cliffs, to feel any great alarm for their safety. But very lately matters were not moving so easily for the lawbreakers. Jube Jarvis had no sympathy with the illicit trade; he kept well out of it, and out of its secret hiding places. The "Revernuers" were welcome to come and go, to destroy or to pass by; it was nothing, personally, to old Jube. But this boy, Joe Bentley, was a great deal to Jube;

if danger threatened Joe, however remotely, he wanted to know it.

He thought a good deal about it after the strange man left the store; why had he picked out Joe for his service? And how was it that he had chanced to come to the store at the same time, and such an unusual time, that Joe had come? Might he not have been following him, spying upon him, all the morning? And Joe had admitted that he had been upon an unlawful errand. The merchant had grave fears.

"It jest won't do," said he: "Joe ain't had any manner o' showin' in this world. Though I aint sayin' but what he's got a good, smart old gran'mother that aims to do right by him. But he's young an' onwary. If that thar saft-speakin' youngster should overtake Joe on the road, he would, like as not up an' confide to him ever thing he knows, an' git hisse'f into no end o' trouble, may be. I'm good mind to close up an' go after him."

Then he remembered that he had cautioned Joe to keep the trail, or "nigh cut," through

the woods. This trail, both narrow and steep, had been made by the adventurous cattle herders on Hickorynut mountain, who were wont to come across to the settlement Saturday afternoons for supplies. It shortened the distance to Lige Bentley's cabin by more than a mile; and sure-footed old Kit was not afraid of its steeps and windings.

"If Joe keeps to the trail he'll be safe enough," said the merchant; "an' 'gainst he strikes the big road on the way back thar'll be too many o' the mount'n boys round to make it healthy for strangers wearin' store clothes, I reckin."

At that moment there came to him the sound of a horn; a soft blast, blown from the doorway of the house across the road; he knew that it meant his breakfast was ready.

He went out, drawing the door after him, and stood a moment watching the long, yellow road from the settlement. Another blast from the horn reminded him that his cakes were cooling. Still he lingered, watching for Joe. But there was nothing to be seen save that straight, broad line of yellow sand gleaming in the sunlight.

CHAPTER II

A SIGNAL AND A WARNING

THERE was to be a gander-pulling in the neighborhood that day, and the storekeeper knew that all the people for miles around would be on hand to see the fun. The boys from down on Brushy Creek, to say nothing of those over on Pine Knot mountain, would turn out in full force; for fun was scarce, and to the mountaineers there are few things so diverting as a gander-pulling.

The storekeeper had reckoned upon the crowd that would visit the store that morning, and was not sorry that he was to have Joe's assistance. For although the entertainment was not to come off until afternoon, the crowd would come early in the morning, bringing their dinners and making an all-day trip of it. The forenoon, for the most part, would be spent at the store; not

so much in trading as in friendly gossip, though the women, to be sure, would bring their dried fruit and "spun truck" along to barter with old Jube for sugar and coffee and molasses.

The merchant gave a sigh of genuine relief as he approached the store and saw through the open door, Joe's cheery face beaming above the counter. The place had been carefully swept, and already there were two visitors occupying the shuck-bottomed chairs set convenient for customers just without the door.

"I would have come over an' told you, Mr. Jarvis," said Joe; "but they-uns allowed they'd only come to set a spell, an' not to trade; an' so I didn't see no call for startin' of you up from your breakfast. I allowed as may be I could wait on sech as come before you got back. But thar ain't been a blessed soul exceptin' of Mr. Long out thar an' Jem."

Jube recognized the early visitors as a man and his son, said to be in league with a certain distiller by the name of Dawson, who was sup-

posed to be operating a still some miles away among the hills. He had scarcely time to more than say good-morning, however, before others began to come in, some to gossip, some to trade, and ere long the little store was crowded.

Among the very first to arrive was an old woman by the name of Martin, Polly Martin, known throughout the neighborhood for the sharpness of her tongue, as well as of her wits. She came up, panting and blowing from her long tramp, plumped an open-mouthed jar down on the step, nodded to the assembled neighbors and went into the store, carrying a roll of yellow yarn, some home-knit socks, and a bag of dried fruit, which she had brought to barter for certain necessary articles, after the custom of the mountaineers. She entered with a brusque, business-like air, and a semblance of extreme good humor; but the practiced eye of the storekeeper saw the anxiety underlying the make-believe lightness.

"Mornin', folkses! mornin', Jube!" was her

greeting. "Got any time to fritter away on a ole woman like me, Jube? Then stir your stumps, man, an' let me get along back home. The men folkses at my place air plumb set on goin' to the gander-pullin' this evenin', an' I'm obleeged to git back an' stay long o' the chillen, an' the house, so as they-uns can go. It won't do to disapp'int the men folkses, I tell you; the men folkses an' the gander. Why, I a'most misdoubts that thar gander could get its own consent to have its neck pulled without the men from my place. 'Pears like the gander would sort o' know it would be a disapp'intin' occasion. Want some socks to-day, Jube? I'm plumb set on havin' some sorghum for the chillen. We-uns ain't got a drap. The last I got ware not good. I tromped five mile an' better to git it; over to Yarbrough's. An' Yarbrough don't measure fair, nuther. So this mornin' I says to the chillen, says I, 'Jube Jarvis gives fair measure, an' I be goin' over to trade with Jube. An' here I be.'"

The storekeeper grunted, as he proceeded to

unwrap the bundle of yarn. "Since you ware so set on tradin' along o' me," said he, "whyn't you fetch them thar eggs here las' Christmas, as you promised to do?"

"Laws-a-massy, Jube, ain't you-uns forgot them eggs yit? Why, they'd a been e't up long ago, or else sp'iled. What diffe'nce can it make this late day?"

"It makes the diffe'nce of a promise," said Jube. "I allers keep my word to folkses, an' I look to others to keep thar word to me. What air you wantin' for this truck, Mis' Martin?"

"Some sorghum, Jube. Thar's the jar for it outside the door. I ware that fagged out I couldn't fetch it another step. I want some sorghum an' a mite o' coffee. Then I want a slip o' bacon for the apples. An' I allowed as may be you-uns'd fling in a box o' snuff. I ain't had a good dip since I traded for that thar box last summer. Do you rickerlect, Jube?"

"I ain't goin' to throw in a blessed thing," declared the storekeeper. "I aims to be fair, an' may be generous, with my own customers,

but I ain't obligated to make presents to Jim Yarbrough's customers. You-uns can go over thar fur snuff. I'll fill the jar an' let you have the meat, but I ain't throwin' in no extrys."

It was a small thing, merely an incident in the day's happenings. There was a touch of surliness about it, too, that appealed to the merchant's sense of fairness, making him half regret what he had done when he saw the old woman start on her long tramp to the desolate cabin among the crags. In winter, when the trees were stripped of their foliage, he could see the brown cabin perched upon the steep bluffs, in the rear of the store, like a great ungainly vulture ready to swoop down upon the unsuspecting little settlement. It was scarcely a half-mile distant straight up the bluffs, but the crags were bold and steep, and the three-mile tramp by the public road was less fatiguing than any attempt to scale those almost inaccessible heights.

The storekeeper felt himself a brute to refuse

the snuff; it would have made a welcome companion on that long, tiresome trip. He hadn't a doubt but that was what had brought her to the store; and he had a suspicion that she had stolen away to the settlement without the knowledge of her husband, for she generally did her trading at a distant settlement on the other side of the bluff, with a merchant by the name of Yarbrough. Yarbrough was close and grasping, and Jube knew that it was old Martin who made his wife do her trading there; he and Jube had quarreled some time since, and after that old Mrs. Martin never came to the settlement except on such occasions as she could "slip off," unknown to the old man. She had relied upon Jube's generosity to throw in the snuff. Jube was disgusted with himself; he thought once of sending Joe to run and overtake her with the box, but some one came in and it slipped his mind.

A little thing, merely a box of disgusting, yellow snuff; yet, could he have foreseen the part it was to play in the day's proceedings he would

indeed have felt, as he said, "that you can't allers tell whar a little, small act will end."

The new arrival who distracted the storekeeper's attention from the episode of the snuff was a young man, who, at a glance, the merchant supposed to be a stranger. But a second look convinced him there was something odd, and not altogether unfamiliar, in the man's appearance. The mass of yellow hair that crowned his rather shapely head didn't appear to have just a natural set; and the hands, though dark, were too small to belong to the mountaineers. In an instant the storekeeper recognized the fact that this new arrival was disguised.

He asked for a "plug of chawing tobaccy" in such a very natural drawl, however, that for a moment the merchant almost doubted the disguise.

He paid for his purchase, bit off a great hunk of it, and strolling over to an empty, upturned cracker box, dropped leisurely down upon it as though he had merely stopped in, in a

most natural way, to hear the gossip of the day.

Close upon his heels came Dawson, the moonshiner, who seldom showed himself about the settlement, and whose coming at this moment filled Jube's heart with forebodings of trouble.

Dawson stood leaning a moment against the counter, watching the stranger through his ugly, swollen lids. His two confederates, Long and his son, moved their chairs nearer the open door, thus commanding a view of the entire store.

And all the time that Dawson was eyeing the strange man, the stranger was watching Joe Bentley. Many times Joe had passed him, brushing him more than once in the crowd, as he went in and out carrying bundles to the wagons of the customers, hitching horses for the women, and sometimes carrying a pail full of water to some thirsty traveler en route to the gander-pulling.

And Jube—keen-eyed, sharp-witted old Jube Jarvis—was watching the entire proceedings;

and always with an eye single to the safety of his young assistant.

When the rush of custom had subsided somewhat, Dawson addressed the merchant:

"Had many callers this mornin', Jube?"

"Right sharp," was the reply, given with indifferent interest.

"Didn't any come afore you ware up, I reckin, did they, Jube?" said old man Long from the doorway

The storekeeper looked up just in time to catch the unmistakable wink that passed between him and Dawson. But he was quite ready for them.

"Why, yes," said he, in the same tone of indifference; "I did have a customer, so to speak, afore I ware fairly up this mornin'. Come in a mighty hurry, ridin' a right peart nag, an' didn't stop powerful long, nuther."

A shade of purple seemed to gather under the red of Dawson's skin, as he demanded to know who the customer was.

"Who ware it?" said he. "Who ware it come a-tradin' so early?"

The merchant glanced at the young clerk, measuring at that moment a peck of dried beans into a bag, and said:

"Why, Joe, thar."

"Joe?"

"Yes, Joe Bentley; come to git some coffee for his granny afore settin' in for his day's work. An' the spry young nag he rid over, why, it's tethered out thar somewhars, I reckin. She answers to the name of Kit, if you're wantin' to talk to her."

There was a laugh among the men, at Dawson's expense; even the big distiller himself smiled at the storekeeper's wit, and not one of them thought to inquire if Joe was the only customer who had called in the early hours of the morning. Jube had his answer ready, but as nobody put the question he said no more; only to tell himself that it was "none of his business to remind them of their oversight."

At that moment he chanced to look at the man on the cracker box. Did the fellow give him a wink before dropping his gaze to the

floor? A moment later, on some pretext of looking for something on that side of the room, Jube approached the stranger and gave him a more critical survey. In dress he was a typical mountaineer, wearing a suit of brownish-gray jeans, a loose frock coat, old, and somewhat patched; a red necktie, considerably crumpled, and a slouch hat, rammed in, sugar-loaf fashion, topping the shock of yellow hair.

About this time one of the men about the door called out in friendly salutation:

"Hello, stranger; whar'd you hail from?"

The man on the box replied in the very purest dialect:

"From over on Cooney, down yander."

"Come a-pleasurin'?" said Dawson.

"Come to see the gyander-pullin'," was the reply.

After this the talk became general, the interest shifting to the gander that was expected to furnish sport for the afternoon.

Some "allowed" that Jim Teik would get the gander's neck "first pull;" while others main-

tained that "Lush Simmons would never so much as let Teik git his fingers greased," if Lush should be so lucky as to "draw his pull before Teik's chance came."

In the general discussion the visitor from Cooney was really forgotten. And evidently the visitor from Cooney forgot himself; in fact he must have forgotten that he was from Cooney at all, and a mountaineer, and supposed to know all about gander-pullings. For as the interest waxed warmer, he tilted himself back as gracefully as the backless box would admit of his doing, and called out to the astonished assembly, regardless of dialect and forgetful of consequences:

"How is it done, gentlemen? How is the gander pulled?"

A full dozen bounded to their feet, in sheer astonishment. Dawson slipped his hand down to the hilt of the blade in his belt and waited developments.

"Live on Cooney an' never see a gander-pullin'?" said one.

"Why Cooney Creek air gander heaven," declared another. While a third laughed outright, and declared: "Why, my grandad used to live on Cooney Creek, an' his old woman p'intedly raised ganders for a livin'; the boys ware that give to pullin' of 'em. Whar's your mammy, son, that you-uns ain't never see a gander-pullin'?"

It was Dawson, however, who really answered the stranger's question; he squared himself in the sunlighted doorway, his hand toying with the bit of yellow horn hilt visible at his belt, and said:

"Well, stranger—"

There was just the faintest glimmer of steel below the knife's hilt, but the stranger only smiled in an innocent, boyish way and said:

"Well, I'm a-listnin' to you."

"Well, then," said Dawson, "we pull 'em here right frequent. If a gander don't come real handy we jest pull somethin' else instid. The way we do it air this: we first find out if he's a good bird for neck twistin', fitten for nothin' else more'n likely, an then we grease his neck

right good and swing him up by his feet, if he's a sure 'nough gander. Then the boys mount thar horses, and then the 'ringmaster,' as they say in the circus, he gives the nag a whack with a raw hide that sends him spinnin' under the gander's tree whar he air swung to, an' the rider has to make a lunge at that thar greased neck o' the gander's. That's the way we pull ganders in this country, stranger, only we don't allers stop to grease thar necks. 'Pends on who air the ringmaster. But you-uns come on an' see the pullin' this evenin'; we'll pull one jest to pleasure you; maybe we'll pull two."

There was ugly meaning in Dawson's words, but the stranger did not show the faintest sign that he failed to take the description in good part; his reply contained more regret for his own ignorance than any doubt of Dawson's sincerity;

"We-uns aint been livin'on Cooney very long, an' thar waren't any gander-pullin' whar I ware raised. I mean to see this one though, for sure an' sartain."

He got up after awhile, and went off in the direction of the place selected for the day's sport, about a half-mile beyond the settlement. Others began to drop off soon, and before twelve o'clock only the proprietor and Joe were left in the store.

When the last old woman had ridden away on a sway-back mare with a long-legged colt at her heels, a carpet-bag satchel swung to the horn of the saddle, and a mop between the gums of the toothless rider, Mr. Jarvis called Joe to him.

"Want to go to the gander-pullin', Joe?" said he.

"No, sir," Joe replied with suspicious promptness.

"Go if you want to," said the merchant; "go if you want to."

But Joe shook his head.

"Granny said I ware not to go," said he. "Granny allowed that thar ware not any sport but only cruelty in treatin' of ganders that way: an' she said we-uns had had trouble an' suff'rin'

enough without wantin' to make pleasure out o' the sufferin's o' others: though it mightn't be nothin' but a foolish old gander. I'd ruther stay here after granny said that, an' tend the store. But you go on, Mr. Jarvis, I can take keer o' things. You go on to the pullin'."

"An' what makes you allow I could find my pleasure in the suffrin's of one o' God A'mighty's critters?" demanded the storekeeper.

Joe colored:

"I didn't mean that thar," said he quickly. "Some folks allow ganders don't count nohows, being as they-uns have got to die anyway. An' some say they haven't got any reasonin' an' don't know if they air ill-treated, an' I have heard say ganders can't die."

The merchant grunted:

"Heard that from them as likes to see the pullin' o' thar necks, I reckin. Most folkses cut thar cloth to hide thar own deformities, Joe, jest you rickerlect that. Now I'm a-goin' over yander to see that thar gander die. He ain't any relation o' mine, as I knows on;

an' no matter what the kinship air, I'm a-goin' to see him die. You run over to the house an' tell Sary to give you a bite o' dinner: then skip back here an' I'll go and eat, an' then keep right on to the pullin'. I sha'n't be gone mighty long: an' if anybody comes along here askin' after me, do you jest say I've gone to the gander-pullin', an' if anybody comes wantin' to hire you-uns, jest tell 'em you're hired to me: for two days. I reckin you didn't know I put two pounds o' coffee in that thar package this morning. Well, I did: an' I claim you for two days to pay for it. So thar."

"Now, Mr. Jarvis," said Joe earnestly, "I'm pow'ful sorry you done that. I can't come to-morrow, for true. I've got to—got to—why, I'm obligated to work somewhars else to-morrow."

"Whar?" demanded the merchant. "Whar have you got to work so suddent?"

Joe hesitated, and glanced apprehensively at the yellow sand of the road outside. Somehow he always seemed to feel the sole of Jube's big

boot whenever he looked at that sandy road. He had seen grown up men go spinning out into it, helped along by that same boot: he fancied that a boy of his size might never stop short of the tops of the big maple tree, if old Jube decided to kick him out.

He fancied, too, that Jube must know of his father's still: it had been running for several years. Yet he dared not tell the old man that his father had ordered him to haul a load of apples to the still the very next morning; and to remain there and help the men with some mash they were making.

The boy's embarrassment misled the storekeeper: his thought was that the stranger of the early morning had intercepted Joe after all, and that he was about to step into some trap that had been laid for him.

He laid his hand on the boy's arm.

"See here, Joe," said he, "me an' my old woman have allers had a feelin' for you-uns, seein' as you ain't got any mammy, an' worse than no pappy. You ain't had much show in

this world, an' I've been thinkin' that some time maybe you'll be tellin' youse'f that you ain't to blame for doin' of things aginst the law, an' sech as that. Now I want to tell you that you will be to blame. The law'll hold you jest as guilty as it holds the meanest of its critters who go an' do the same thing you-uns may do. An' the good Lord ain't goin' to hold you innercent, nuther, beca'se he has give you the gift of reasonin', an' of knowin' right from wrong. He ain't goin' to hold no soul innercent on which he has bestowed the gift of conscience. Now, do you rickerlect that! Now, I'm goin' to be gone a bit, an' if anybody comes a-snakin' in here tryin' to toll you off, or hire you, do you jest say Jube Jarvis won't let you off, an' that'll end it. An' mind you don't do any extry tongue work, nuther, whilest I'm gone. Run on, now, an' git your dinner."

At the door Joe turned, stopped.

"Mr. Jarvis," said he, "I'm obleeged to work at—at home to-morrow. Leastways father —said—said—"

"Oh, at home!" said the merchant. "Whyn't you say so at first? Well, you needn't be worryin' about that. I'm thinkin' they won't need you to-morrow, Joe."

Joe hadn't the faintest idea what he meant, but he was very glad to think the storekeeper might be right, and that he should be at liberty to work at the store. And he felt glad, too, now that he could see his way to paying for it, that granny had her coffee for some days to come.

When the merchant had gone off to the gander-pulling, and no other customers came in, Joe began to feel lonely. The very silence, after the noisy crowd, had a loneliness about it, and the parting admonition of the storekeeper, too, served to make the boy thoughtful. The earnest words had sunk deep into his heart, filling it with a strange half fear of something that might, perhaps, be threatening his own peace.

He became almost afraid of the familiar old store itself after awhile. The big barrels as-

sumed a certain aspect of awe, as though they could foresee the trouble ahead, and would have warned him if they could.

After struggling for half an hour with the feeling, which he told himself was mere cowardice, he went out and took a seat in one of the vacant chairs on the little porch, and gave himself up to reflection. He had been unhappy enough carrying that fearful secret of the hidden still over on the Rainbow Falls; but now the thought that God would not hold him guiltless filled him with a fear infinitely more dreadful than any fear of man's broken laws.

What could he do? Refuse to haul the apples that made him a party to the unlawful business? That would be to bring down upon himself the wrath of his father, with such punishment as he did not now feel able to bear. And already the men were clamoring for more of his time. He was "too saft," they declared; too much "afeard of his shadder," and "too good to be real trusty." He might consider it

his duty, they declared, to "up an' give the still away some time."

So they demanded that he should be made to feel himself a partner in the business, a law-breaker as well as they, since this was the only sure means of "stopping his mouth."

"After awhile," they said, "when he's older, he'll see things different." After awhile they knew that his tender conscience would have become hardened and he would indeed be one of them. "Unless," they always added, "Lige don't make out to kill him first, in a drunken temper."

Defy men like that? The mere thought of it brought to him the memory of the rawhide; he winced, as though he could feel it cutting into his flesh. Once he thought of running away: but he remembered granny, and gave up that plan of escape at once. Suddenly a clatter of hoofs, muffled somewhat by the sandy road, broke in upon his thought. A moment later the tawny mane of a great claybank gelding, side by side with a gallant roan, dashed into

sight. The horses were strange to the community: Joe recognized on the instant that both animals and riders were from a distance. No such steeds were ever seen among those rocky ways: great glossy-limbed, foam-flecked creatures that seemed to take hold upon the solid earth with their strong, shapely feet. Joe watched them in fascinated surprise for a moment. As they drew nearer he saw that they were mud-spattered and somewhat overheated, as though they had traveled far and fast.

They galloped straight up to the settlement store where Joe was sitting, and stopped. Then, for the first time, Joe remembered that they might be members of the revenue service.

He had scarcely drawn his breath, however, before one of the men addressed him:

"Hello, bub," said the rider of the claybank, "where's the boss?"

Instantly Joe remembered the storekeeper's warning and instructions:

"Gone ter the gander-pullin," said he.

The men seemed disturbed for a moment:

they held a short, half-whispered consultation, then the one who had spoken to Joe said:

"Could we get a drink of water here, bub?"

Joe replied, without moving from his chair:

"Thar ain't any water here fitten ter drink, an' I can't leave the store ter fetch any. Thar was a pail, full and fresh; but Jim Sanderson's coon got in it an' washed his hands, an' it aint fitten ter drink. Thar's a spring right over thar cross the road, an' a new gourd: ye can get a drink thar."

Joe gave this information without the faintest show of interest: the strangers might have been discouraged as to further conversation had their business not been so urgent.

"See here, bub," said one, "we are mighty sorry to have missed Mr. Jarvis. But maybe you can tell us the way to the Eastop place. It is out this way somewhere?"

Joe shook his head: "Don't know nothin' 'bout it."

The strangers held another whispered consultation, then turned to Joe again:

"See here, bub, can't we hire you awhile?"

Joe started, and almost tumbled off his chair: he was wondering how on earth Mr. Jarvis knew what these men were going to say to him. Evidently he did know, and that was sufficient to prompt Joe to reply without hesitation, and in a way that admitted of no argument:

"No, sir," said he, "ye can't. I'm hired here: ter keep store."

"To-morrow, then," said the stranger; "see here!" He ran his hand into his pocket and drew out a half-dozen silver coins. He held up a bright new dollar. "I'll give you, say five of these, for a day's work; if you do it well I'll make it ten!"

To a boy brought up in simple, humble ways, as Joe had been, the money did not possess any very great temptation, although he understood that those ten dollars would bring many things into the little cabin on the bluff hitherto unknown there. With those pieces of silver safely hidden away from his father's eye, his grandmother would be sure of her coffee for

many a day, when Lige was drunk and would not allow them to send to the store for it. He thought of the new tools they would add to the little chest under granny's bed, and of the tobacco with which they would supply her pipe, if only they were his. He thought very quickly, however, and not once with any idea of accepting the offer tendered him; he was already hired; that was sufficient reason for refusal, without Mr. Jarvis's special warning. He shook his yellow-crowned head, therefore, and replied with dogged persistence:

"I ain't fur hire to-morrer nuther; I'm hired here already to Mr. Jarvis; I done told you onc't."

With this they understood that he was regularly employed at the store and at once changed their offer.

"Well, then, we must find Mr. Jarvis," said the gentleman who was astride the roan. "Scoot down from there, youngster, and pilot us to the place where they are having the gander-pulling and you get that."

He flipped a dollar at him with his thumb and forefinger as he spoke. The silver struck Joe's knee and fell upon the floor, where it made a dozen little revolutions in the sunlight before it lay at the boy's feet with the goddess of liberty staring at him in a sort of injured surprise.

Joe merely glanced at the money without stirring from his place.

"I'm obligated to stay right here," said he, "and I aim to stay. I mostly tries to do what I'm obligated to do; but you-uns can find the gander-pullin' easy enough; keep straight ahead that thar road right before you till you come to a big boulder 'longside the way; storm flung it off the bluff one night an' left it thar. When you git to the boulder, turn to the left and thar's the gander pullin'."

He stooped, picked up the silver, handed it back to its owner, and then went immediately into the store. He had suddenly remembered Jube's last warning, "not to talk too much."

"Seems to me," he told himself, as he moved

among the familiar boxes in the rear of the house, "seems to me the kentry air full of gunpowder, ready to go off."

The strange men parleyed a moment at the door.

"It isn't any earthly use," said one, "to try to make it without the boy. With that boy as a guide we could go right into the midst of them, two attorneys, as it were, securing evidence concerning the late murder at the Eastop place— Hush!"

From the crags in the rear of the store came the sound of a horn—a long, mellow note, followed by three short, sharp, commanding ones. Again, and yet a third time it was repeated: that strange, commanding melody, and always precisely the same note, in precisely the same time. The men started; the horn was a signal, a warning to some one, somewhere.

Joe, bending over a nail keg, heard it and turned a startled face to the door. At that moment a man came running from the woods across the road. He was carrying a gun, and a long

hunting knife was in his belt. He gesticulated wildly to the men sitting on their horses before the door of the store, and shouted a warning that came distinctly to Joe's ears:

"For your lives—ride!"

The next instant the strangers had put spurs to their horses and were galloping down the mountain in a cloud of yellow dust, as fast as their steeds could carry them; riding for their lives. The horn was a signal from some point, warning the wildcatters that the revenue officers were on their track. Joe recognized it at once as the signal agreed upon among these daring violators of the law. But if the officers had an enemy who was spying upon them they likewise had an ally, and Joe Bentley had recognized in that ally Joyce Grim, one of the most regular patrons of the various illicit establishments scattered throughout the mountain.

The officers had taken to flight at once; when they were well out of sight Grim strolled leisurely into the store and asked for some

tobacco. Having paid for it, he dropped with a great pretense of weariness upon the cracker box where earlier in the day the stranger from Cooney had sat, and began to tell Joe of a thrilling fox hunt that he had been enjoying. "T'ware away over yander on Pant'er Creek," he declared. "I tromped all night long to git here in time to holp pay complimints to that thar gyander-pullin', an' come up jest in time to miss it at the last. Jest my luck; allers my luck. Never had no luck at nuthin', nohows. Didn't git no fox nuther, the blame critter run itse'f into a bresh heap sech as no respectable dog would go into after it. Had to give it up; gander same way. Well, well! I reckin I'll jest set here an' keep you-uns comp'ny till the rest come back, Joe."

Joe said nothing; he knew well enough that Grim's sharp, little black eyes were fixed upon him, and he almost trembled lest they should probe the terrible secret of which he had accidentally become possessed. He knew that this was what had brought the man into the store;

to learn whether Joe had seen and heard that which he had done. And he had seen the signal and had heard the warning; he understood that the men were revenue officers, and that Joyce was an informer, a spy. Joe knew also that this meant certain death if once the spy should come within the power of the moonshiners. Grim's doom was sealed, as sure as fate, if information came to their ears concerning that signal, and that three-word warning: "For your lives!"

Joe was too startled to quite understand what he meant to do, but he knew that Grim must not know that he had seen or heard. He tried to speak of other things; to ask about the fox hunt; but somehow his tongue refused to obey him. Had he spoken at all he felt that he would have shrieked out, loud enough to be heard at the gander-pulling, half mile away; and what he said would be: "What made you do it? Don't you know they will hang you for telling where the stills are hid?" It seemed to him ages that he sat there trying to ask about

the fox hunt over on Panther Creek, and saying nothing; in reality it was not three minutes.

Suddenly the informer lifted himself with a bound to his feet and reached for his knife. He had caught the expression of fear in Joe's face.

"What do ye know?" he hissed. "What did ye see? What did ye hear? Out with it, ye saft-spoke kid ye, afore I rip it from ye with my knife. An' you got to swear you wont tell it, no matter who may ask you. I ain't told on your pappy nohows. Swear, I tell you, afore I come any nigher."

The informer gave the knife a threatening turn as he drew nearer. Evidently he supposed he had only a "kid," as he said, to deal with. But Joe was not so "soft" as Grim had supposed. He sprang back, squared himself against the wall, and doubled his fists:

"Stan' back thar, Joyce Grim," said he, "Stan' back thar, I tell you, You'll find it a mighty sorry day for you if you lay that thar knife on me."

Whether the threat was merely to frighten

him into silence, or whether there was something that appealed to him in the sight of the boy, ready, single handed, to fight for his life, Joe did not know, but sullenly Joyce stopped and slowly sheathed his knife.

"Now," said he, "ain't you a pretty baby to come a-bullyin' of a man my size."

"An' ain't you a pretty coward," said Joe "to come a-threatenin' of a boy my size? A mighty brave man you. Maybe you think beca'se I'm 'saft' I won't fight nuther, but don't you be befoolin of yourse'f, thinkin' as I'll stand by an' whimper whilest you-uns tries to skeer me; or maybe kill me with that thar huntin' knife o' yourn. But I will; I'll fight till I drap in my tracks, 'fore I'll let a bully like you-uns be imposin' on me wrongful. Stan' back thar, I tell you. Whyn't you gimme time to answer you? No; I won't lie for nobody; an' I wont swear nuther; not for nobody, let alone you-uns. You ax me what I see an' heeard? Well, I see you-uns—"

"Shet up thar!" yelled Grim; "if you don't

want your mouth shet for you. Bawlin' out to the whole—"

A step sounded outside, perhaps Grim had heard it, and a stout, familiar figure filled the doorway.

"How now? What's up? What's all this here row in my house mean? What you doin' here, Grim?"

Jube Jarvis stood in the door, his usually pleasant face angry and threatening; he glanced at the visitor, dogged and sullen enough he looked now, and then at Joe, braced against the wall, with his eyes full of anger and his hands still drawn up into fists.

"He come at me with his knife," said Joe. "He come at me with his knife, Mr. Jarvis, an' allowed I ware a 'saft-spoke kid' beca'se I see him—"

Jube Jarvis didn't care to shoulder Grim's deadly secret; he didn't wait for Joe to finish, he merely stepped across the room, lifted his big cowhide boot and sent his last customer flying through the open door like a spent sky rocket on the home trip.

He landed in front of the horses of a party returning from the gander-pulling, and a loud guffaw greeted his descent, head foremost in the yellow sand.

They jibed and joked him without mercy as he struggled to his feet spitting the sand from his mouth, and shaking it from his hair; while more than one rider wondered to his neighbor who "Joyce Grim had been a-trying to fight in Jube Jarvis's store, to make the ole man kick him out."

That kick, however, did good service as testimony later on when the moonshiners were hunting evidence concerning the information to the officers.

As for Grim, he followed the warning given the officers, and "rode for his life." That was the last ever seen of him on the mountain.

The storekeeper had nothing to say for a long while, after the odd exit to which he had assisted his unwelcome customer. Joe felt uneasy enough: he had knowingly and purposely broken one of the rules of the store. He had

more than half expected to be kicked out himself, and was not by any means sure just what manner of punishment would be inflicted upon him. He was sorry to have been the cause of disturbance: yet he was not the least sorry that he had defied Joyce Grim.

"Can't anything make me sorry I tol' that thar sneak he was a coward," said he as he stood back among the shadows in the store waiting for Mr. Jarvis to speak.

The old man sat in front of the door, on the outside, smoking his pipe, his old face wearing something very nearly resembling a smile, only Joe did not know that, for the face was turned from him, and moreover was half hidden by the smoke rising from the pipe.

Joe glanced at the tall maple tree, and then down at his own spare dimensions.

"Ef he'd a kicked me plumb square up to the topmos' limbs I'd be glad I sassed that thar Grim," said he; and he said it aloud, without being conscious that he was speaking. "Wanted to swear me to lie for him." The chair in

which the proprietor was sitting squeaked, ever so lightly, and the fat figure of the proprietor shook, just the least little bit, but nobody saw it, except it might be a crow that was passing overhead to a dead tree on the crags hard by

Twilight descended, the merchant smoked on; and still Joe waited for his scolding. Finally he went outside, where Mr. Jarvis was sitting, and hung about silent and uneasy, until at last the merchant looked up from his pipe and said:

"Well, Joe? Well, sir?"

"I hope, sir," said Joe, plunging at once into the trouble, "I hope you ben't mad beca'se I fit him in the store."

The fat face was suddenly obscured by a cloud of blue smoke, but there was a half concealed satisfaction in the old man's voice as he said, with well assumed carelessness:

"Did ye fight him, Joe?"

"I would a fit," said Joe. "I ain't desarvin' of no good words for not fightin', Mr. Jarvis,

for I would a fit in a minute. He drawed on me, an' called me a 'saft-spoke,' an' allowed I had to tell what I knowed, else he'd git it from me with his knife. If he'd come a step nigher I'd a fit him. I ware just good for a fight. I told him so, an' he stopped. But I called him a coward, right thar in you-uns' store. I ware tolerble mad, an' I reckin there'd been a fight if you hadn't come in when you did. I'm pow'ful sorry it ware in the store, Mr. Jarvis, but thar can't no coward come a-bullyin' of me, nor swearin' of me to a lie."

Mr. Jarvis took the pipe from his mouth, tapped the bowl gently upon the palm of his hand: the white ash fell lightly, noiselessly to the floor, a red spark gleaming for a second among the dead grayness.

"Joe," said he, "a boy has got to learn to live peaceable if he expects to be a peaceable man."

"Yes, sir," said Joe, choking back the tears, "I know that air true."

"An'," continued the storekeeper without

noticing the interruption, "a boy has got to learn to stan' up for hisse'f ef he expects to be a man, an' have the respect of men. Now don't you never go courtin' of a fight: an' keep out o' sech if ye can. But if a coward comes bullyin' of you an' tryin' to skeer you into that you know to be wrong, do you just stand up for yourse'f like a man! If you can't whip him you can be whipped standin' up for your principles. Son, I'm downright proud of you." And the storekeeper quietly refilled his pipe.

The next day old Mrs. Martin had occasion to pay a visit to a neighbor. She went to borrow a dip of snuff, and what she said was:

"Gimme the dip, Almiry, I must be skittin' along back. The old man don't know I'm here. But I jest can't tromp over to Yarbrough's this day; an' I jest can't stand it no longer not to have a dip o' snuff. But I must get along back; the old man's mighty upset about my blowin' of the horn yistiddy. You might a heard him quar'lin' plumb over to the settlemint. You

see, I went over to Jube's yistiddy to get a box o' snuff; but Jube, he got a close fit on him somehows, an' he wouldn't trade—my way. So I went 'long back home, an' the men folks all went off to the gander-pullin'. After they-uns ware all gone it began to git a little lonesome; an' the lonesomer it got the more I missed that thar dip. So I says to the chillen, says I, 'I'm a-goin' to see a old woman down on Sugar Creek what's down with the fever, an' I'll git a dip down thar.' It war three good mile, if it war a step. I tromped it every foot. And when I got thar, bless your soul, thar wasn't a dust of snuff in the house; an' the pore old critter that sick and not a soul, barrin' a little gran'child, to do a thing about the place. So I made out to straighten the house up some, for the land knows it was needin' of straightenin'; an' then I set a spell an' we-uns talked; an' then I put her up a bite of warm victuals, an' then I went home. An' all the time that thar dip what Jube got too stingy to trade for was a-troublin' of my mind. So instid o' comin' on straight home I turned

off into the crossroads—t'wa'nt no more'n a mile out'n the way—to Ann Long's house, to borry a dip of Ann. Ann's box ware empty as a gourd, too, but she crumpled up a handful of the old man's tobaccy an' give me that to sort o' stay my appetite for the snuff till I could get over to Yarbrough's, or else till Jube got over his close fit. After Ann fixed up the tobaccy dust for me, I started home. About half way thar, after striking the big road again, I met two mens a-ridin' of the fines' nags I ever set eyes on. My! my! but they ware pretty! One of 'em ware a claybank; the very spit of one my dad useter own; an' he allers said his ware the very spit o' one his dad—my gran'dad—useter own; one he rid to the polls onc't to vote for Henry Clay to be preserdint. I ain't never heard if Henry Clay ware 'lected preserdint or no, but that ain't a-henderin' of my gran'dad ridin' that thar claybank to the polls to vote for him. So when I see this here one a-comin' down the road all spick an' span, I jest stepped to one side, an' I know in my soul if I'd

had on a hat I'd a lifted of it to that thar nag, an' says I, 'Land alive! if that don't remind me o' Henry Clay!' One o' the men's heeard me, an' they stopped, an' says one: 'Can you show us the way to Eastop house?' 'Straight road,' says I. 'Nary crook nor crank to it; nary blessed turn.' Then says one: 'We air workin' up that thar murder as ware done thar las' month. Maybe you heeard 'bout it? We air lawyers, from below.' 'Well,' says I, 'I ain't seen many lawyer mens; an' so, gentlemen, I wish you well.' With that they-uns rid on an' I went straight on home. When I got thar the chillen had a mighty tale to tell about two men as had been thar axin' the way to Eastop House. Seems like they had told the chillen all about thar business, too; 'bout bein' lawyer mens an' workin' up that murder; what the whole mount'n knows enough about already. So says I to myself, 'Polly Martin, your gran'dad allers said you had a nose for revernuers. Them thar men air too set on makin' it plain

who they air an' what they're up to.' An' with that I jest stepped to the door an' took down the horn and blowed. I felt powerful upset about breakin' up the gander-pullin', but 'pears like I ware p'intedly bound to head off them 'lawyer mens from below.' I heeard afterward they had been seen nigh the settlement with thar nags all spattered up; don't know whar they got it; they ware spick and span enough when they passed Polly Martin. An' as for that thar claybank, as I ware a-sayin, it ware the very spit o' one my gran'-dad rid to the polls to vote for Henry Clay. Gimme the dip, Almiry. No, you needn't stop to wrop it up; I'm goin' to have it right here on my bresh. I aims to be sure o' that thar dip this time, no matter what happens."

CHAPTER III

IT WAS GRIM WHO TOLD

THE officers went away without making any raids, and after a few days the mountain settled down to its customary quiet: although, to be sure, the distillers from all the country round were secretly trying to discover who was the traitor among them. They did not apprehend any danger, however, as the effort to locate their stills had been unsuccessful. Only in the heart of a boy, a young mountain stripling, there lurked a fear that danger was hovering near. For only Joe had seen the mysterious signal given the horsemen, and only Joe had noticed the disappearance of Joyce Grim.

He felt that he ought to tell his father, yet he dared not. Moreover, the danger did not, he considered, threaten his father's still, and the

liquor made there was not circulated very freely about the neighborhood, but was carted to a distant settlement, and sold.

Yet, while he felt that it was not quite fair to allow the men to go unwarned, so long as the whereabouts of Grim remained a mystery, he could not make up his mind that it was his duty to warn them. Would not this be construed as aiding the lawbreakers

He wished very much to ask the advice of his friend the storekeeper, but Mr. Jarvis refused to listen.

"I could have been strung to a saplin' a hundred times since the men on this mount'n took to stillin', if I'd a mind to listen to all folks have tried to tell me," said he, when Joe broached the subject

At last Joe began to feel that old Jube's plan was a very good as well as a safe one.

"If I done that I'd be better off," he told himself more than once during those slow days of torture when he knew the distillers, with all their shrewdness, had never hit upon the real

culprit in their search for the informer. It was a deadly secret that he carried: yet it had been thrust upon him: he did not ask, did not desire it. And the burden of it was wearing his heart out. The injustice of it appealed to him strongly.

"I ware not peekin," he told himself, "an' I ware not list'nin' in noways, to hear anybody's secrets, when Joyce Grim called to them thar men to 'ride.' I ware not to blame, and I won't kerry the blame of it."

With that he walked boldly up to the storekeeper, bending over a keg of nails, and said:

"Mr. Jarvis, if you ware to git hold of a secret accidental what would you do about it?"

The merchant gave one short, sharp glance at the boy's face. "I'd jest attend to my own business," said he.

And Joe straightway resolved that this was precisely what he would do. But one night, about a week later, something happened that completely upset his plans for following his friend's advice. Since the visit of the strange

men to the neighborhood the fires had been extinguished in the furnaces around, and the distillers, though quiet, were on their guard.

Midway the road from Dawson's place to the settlement there lived an old man of whom the brandymakers had been for some time suspicious. He had come from some one of the valley towns years before; he was very poor and had been a great drunkard, which accounted, doubtless, for his poverty. For years he had been acquainted with the secret paths to the neighborhood stills; no matter how difficult or inaccessible they might be they were never beyond reach of old David Links. Within the last year, however, he had become converted at one of the meetings of the neighborhood and was now loud in his denunciation of the illicit traffic. Instead of the hidden paths through the laurel brakes, the old drunkard followed the dusty highway to the Methodist meeting-house at the head of Panther Creek. Suspicion at once fell upon Links. Links, who had drunk all the liquor he cared to drink in

the old days of his vagabondism, had, they believed, turned traitor, in that he had turned, or attempted to do so, his former comrades over to the law he had once encouraged them in breaking.

Since the still had been idle Joe had spent a good deal of time at the store, doing such jobs as the storekeeper found for him. One evening he tarried at the settlement later than usual. Jube had been unexpectedly called away to an adjoining county on business and had left Joe in charge of the store. It was past seven o'clock before he returned, and, nothing loath, Joe had his supper with Mrs. Jarvis and stayed until Jube got back. The storekeeper had promised, too, to bring back a bottle of liniment for his grandmother, who had been ailing some lately, so Joe had concluded to wait for it. It was eight o'clock when he started out, afoot, for his grandmother's cabin on the bluff. The September moon was shining, a full, golden circle, straight upon the long, sandy line that represented Joe's road. It was a still, warm

night, and he determined to follow the road, instead of striking off into the trail, as was his custom, although it would be a full mile out of his way. He had been shut up in the store all day, and somehow the long, sandy road and the tramp through the still moonlight had a fascination for him to-night. The beauty of the night and the restfulness of nature's perfect peace cast a spell upon him. He walked slowly, dreaming dreams, it might be, of the days to come when the little cabin on the bluff should know better times than these that had fallen upon it; times when he should have become a man.

The road from the settlement lay in a straight, unbroken line for a quarter of a mile before it made a long bend to the left. Just before reaching this bend Joe was accustomed to taking the herders' old trail that cut through the woods, striking the road again beyond the bend, where the trail crossed it, cut through the laurel down the bluff into the little strip of cove land, and then up again to the cabin

on the crags that Joe called home. The herders' trail, to be sure, did not follow this last ascent, but turned off to the right in a line with Hickorynut Mountain.

Joe gave himself up to the pleasure of his walk. There was not a sound to break the night's stillness save the muffled tramp of his own feet along the dusty highway, the hooting of an owl far away among the blasted cedars upon the mountain top, or the occasional startled scurrying of a frightened coon prowling among the wild grapes and luscious muscadines that skirted the roadside.

Joe meant to leave the road at a point where the trail would cross it for the last time. He reached this point and was about to turn off into the shadow-girt stillness when a sudden, sharp, discordant sound seemed to cut like a knife through the exquisite stillness of the night. He stopped, just at the opening of the path, to listen: hoofs, in quick, uneven gait was what he heard. It seemed to Joe, as he stood there listening to the inharmonious clat-

ter, that full one hundred horsemen must be riding down the road. He was not in the least afraid, so he stopped, full of a boy's curiosity, to see who it was that was coming at that gait, at such an hour; for the nine o'clock visitor was as unusual to Joe as the caller that came at midnight. At first he could see nothing, although the moon shone bright as day, but the hurrying hoofs came ever nearer and nearer, until at last they swept into the long, swinging strides of the gallop in perfect movement. But how long they were—

Suddenly they galloped into view, not one hundred, but six horsemen. It seemed to Joe that they were upon him in a half-second, so close that he could see a little strip of black drawn across the upper part of each face, and the glimmer of pistols and of knives where the moonlight flashed across their belts as they dashed toward him. He stepped back into the shadow wondering, waiting. The next moment he saw that which sent the blood in a cold stream through his veins, paralyzing him with

such horror that he could neither move for a moment, nor cry out.

Five of the men were armed, but the sixth, bareheaded, coatless, was bound to the saddle, and in the moonlight Joe distinctly saw the pallid face of old Links. Instantly it occurred to him that they were going to take the old man to the settlement and hang him, leaving him there, perhaps, as a warning to future informers. Such a thing had been done, but it was long, long ago, before the law became so vigilant and so unmerciful to mobs. Joe had scarcely an instant for thought; only the sin, the horror of it, and the part he himself was playing in the terrible tragedy filled his brain, paralyzing for the moment every muscle of his body.

At that instant the gang dashed by him, so close he felt the breath of the leader's horse in his face as it shied past him. And then Joe realized that he must do something, that he must act quickly if he hoped to feel guiltless of this crime of murder. He must save Links; tell what he knew; manage to get

there somehow ahead of the mob. Scarcely knowing what he did, only that he must do something, he darted across the road and into the trail on the other side—the short cut to the settlement. Like a shadow among shadows he sped, straight back to the settlement. He ran like a deer, faster, if possible, than a deer. Though he knew that he had not the faintest chance against those galloping hoofs, still he ran. Something might, something must happen to delay them and give him a chance to tell what he had seen and heard. And even in that hour of horror Joe felt glad that he had not been frightened into a promise not to tell what he knew. He did not stop now to argue with himself, to wonder if he were safe in doing this. He only yielded himself to nature, and that which seemed the one thing possible and right.

The quarter of a mile had never seemed so endless as it did to-night, but he emerged from the shadows at last into the open road to the settlement, footsore, a spent runner indeed, to

see the group gathered under the big maple tree in front of the settlement store.

Not a light was visible, save the golden glory of the moon; and such a sight as she looked down upon!

The men were congregated under the tree, noiseless as shadows, though some one seemed to be giving directions by a sort of pantomime. Joe wondered if he were in time; he tried to call to them, but his throat was dry and parched, and he could not be heard. He understood that they must have stopped to hitch their horses at the bend of the road and that they had walked from there to the tree in order not to arouse the settlement, for anybody could see that the big, burly figure with a bit of calico over his face was Dawson, and Dawson had no wish to be recognized as one of a mob. They worked hurriedly. One of the men had tossed the end of a rope over a limb of the tree; the other was fastened about the neck of a bent old figure that cowered and trembled and begged piteously, in low, broken tones, for life.

Joe tried not to see, lest he should never be able to forget the scene, as he fell, rather than ran, into the midst of the group and shouted:

"Don't do it! Wait—"

As the boy's voice rang out sharply upon the night, a door opened across the way and Jube Jarvis stepped noiselessly out into the shadow of the porch to hear what was going on.

Panting and breathless Joe could only grasp the arm of the man who was holding the rope and gasp, between breaths:

"He—didn't—do it, Mr. Links didn't—I—know. Wait—a—min—ute—I'll—tell—in—a—minute. Take—off—the—rope!"

The hand upon the rope slowly opened; the loose coil fell upon the ground like a serpent slowly unwinding. Surprise at the unexpected interruption drove every other thought from their minds for a moment.

Then Dawson spoke, in a disguised voice:

"See here, bub"—he had recognized Joe as Bentley's boy, but he had no idea of allowing Joe to recognize him—"what is it ye know?

Out with it mighty quick. Else—" He gave the rope a kick with his foot and looked up into the half denuded branches of the tree in a way that made Joe shiver and turn away his eyes.

Jube Jarvis stepped down to the shadow of a hemlock that grew in the corner of his yard and listened. He carried a revolver in his hand; the click of it sounded ominously suggestive as he set the trigger at cock and waited to learn what the mob meant to do in regard to Joe.

Joe, meanwhile recovered his breath sufficiently to make himself understood, and was telling what he knew of the proposed, but foiled, raid.

"Mr. Links didn't tell on ye—" said he, when a voice interrupted:

"On who?"

"On nobody," said Joe. "I don't know fur sure who told, but I'm 'bliged ter tell what I do know, ef I git my own self hanged fur it. I can't set still an' see the innercent suffer noways, an' I reckin Joyce Grim's the one what told."

"Joyce Grim?"

There was a general whisper of surprise.

"Yes, Joyce Grim. I ware keepin' store fur Mr. Jarvis that day, an' I see Joyce Grim make some signs ter them two lawyer men as were tryin' ter hire me ter take 'em ter the gander-pullin'. It ware when Mis' Martin blowed her horn; Joyce he run out o' the woods over thar an' signaled the men: and he hollered ter 'em ter 'ride fur thar lives;' and they rid. Then Joyce he come in the store an' wanted ter fight me, an' make me promise I wouldn't tell no matter who axed me. An' when I wouldn't he drawed his knife an' allowed he'd kill me ef I didn't shet up. An' jest then Mr. Jarvis he come up an' kicked him out fur fightin' in the store. Some of you-uns must a-seen him do it: and then Joyce he run away. An' that's all."

It was a plain story, plainly told. They knew it was true: some of them did remember seeing Jube kick Joyce Grim into the road, and others remembered having heard about it.

Joe felt glad that Grim was beyond their reach that night. If they had been determined to hang old Links on mere suspicion, Joe trembled to think what would have been the fate of the real informer had he come within the power of those infuriated men that night.

When he had told his story Dawson stepped forward and with his own hands cut away the rope that bound their prisoner.

"Do you go down yander," said he, "to that thar thicket whar we-uns left our horses an' pick ye out a nag. Then do ye go home, straight. The nag's your'n: and ye better not let yer jaw wag too much about this night's business, nuther."

Links assented silently: after all, he considered, he was not blameless in the matter: had he not affiliated with them, made himself one of them, he would never have become possessed of their guilty secrets. He accepted the horse as they intended it—as some show of reparation for the wrong they had done him, and soon it was galloping home with him over

the road he had never expected to travel again. And as he rode he registered with God a prayer for the boy who had spoken so bravely and so opportunely in his behalf.

"He's too good fur Lige Bentley an' his gang," said he, "an' I pray the Lord ter pluck him out o' thar hands an' ter reserve him fur Himself."

When Links was set free, the mob disbanded at once: for the confusion had awakened the settlement: more than one window had been opened to ascertain if "it ware daylight already?"

Only one question had been put to Joe: it was Dawson who put it:

"Whyn't ye tell what ye knowed sooner, ye kid ye?"

"Because it ware none o' my business," said Joe.

The men laughed, and their laughter drowned a pleased little chuckle that came from the direction of the hemlock in the corner of Jube's yard.

"Well," said Dawson, "next time ye better try an' make it yer business ter speak up whenst ye know a thing like that."

"No I won't," said Joe. "I won't do no sech thing. I won't be blabbin' about things that don't consarn me, not to please anybody."

Again the men laughed and started off in the direction of the thicket where they had picketed their horses. But Dawson called over his shoulder to Joe as he was going:

"Ye can ride behin' me a piece ef ye're minded, bub."

"I don't want ter," said Joe. "I ain't ridin' with mobs an' sech."

He had grown very bold since he had resolved to face the mob, and he was not sorry to let them know that he disavowed any affiliation with them, and that he had only done what he had in the interest of justice, and not in their interest at all.

Yet, his independence pleased Dawson, too:

"See here, bub," said he, "ye ain't a nat'ral son o' Lige Bentley's, that ye ain't. I can a'most

believe ye're Jube Jarvis's own blood: ye're that like one 'nother."

It was a compliment Joe was not expecting, but the shadow under the hemlock hugged itself closer and chuckled:

"'It ware none o' my business,'" said the storekeeper; "that ware a peart answer, son," and again he chuckled, as he felt that his lessons were not lost upon the boy he had been trying in his own rude fashion to help. "An' he tol': actually tol' on that thar rascal Grim. Made up his own mind an' acted his own act: done it like a man, too. An' how he did sass Dawson: my! my! it ware worth a night's sleep ter know Joe had the grit ter do it. I'm downright proud of ye, son."

And the storekeeper went off to bed again as happy as though he had found a gold mine among the gray bluffs of the mountain, while Joe was whistling along the highway as blithely as though he had heard the storekeeper's commendation: which would indeed have given him quite as much happiness at the moment, as an

equal division of the gold mine, had there been one to divide.

Then quiet settled down upon the mountain again: September drifted, and October, bland and beautiful, crowned the bluffs with the richer hues of scarlet and amber and purple. No further raids had been attempted, and one day a letter had come to some of Grim's people saying that he had run away to Texas.

And so, about a month after the great scare, the furnace fires were rebuilt in the illicit workshops, and the stills put in operation again. In the face of danger and of death, against heavy odds and with mighty risks, with only the great solemn mountain to shelter and conceal them, the distillers again lighted their fires, cleansed their tubs, and set to work, making wildcat whiskey.

CHAPTER IV

A RAID

It was mid-afternoon and the mists lay upon the mountains, the gray, silvery mists, mingling, or trying to mingle, with a long, purplish line that rose and curled into a tell-tale column of smoke, among the bewildering world of hills basking in the October sunlight.

In a little hollow of the hills three men were stretched upon a bed of drifted autumn leaves. They were lying flat forward, hugging the ground as closely as they might and still allow for the handling of the field glass through which they were peering eagerly, passing it from hand to hand, into that gracefully ascending column of purple smoke.

They had watched patiently and long for a glimpse of that purple line, which, they had been told, ought to be rising somewhere in that

direction the day old Lige Bentley should start the fire in his furnace again.

For a month they had been shadowing the place, stealthily, craftily, referring now and then to a roughly drafted code of instructions, a copy of which each man carried in his pocket, for sometimes they had separated for days, meeting again, at last, in the little hollow to watch again for the blue line from Bentley's furnace fire.

They carried no luggage, not even a shotgun, though each man was armed, not for attack, but for protection. They had no other provision against hunger than a simple little lunch tucked away in each man's pocket; for down the mountain, about midway, near what was known to them as the First Bench, there was a house which they called their "Half Way House." It was here they went for food, and to this house they crept at night, under shelter of darkness, to rest and sleep.

Sometimes they went away, down the valley, and were gone for days; and seemingly the

hunt for the illicit still would be abandoned. But after awhile they were back again, still watching for the line of smoke.

The neighborhood had been virtually under detective inspection for a month. And that for which they had been watching they had at last found, a little curl of purple smoke, harmless enough to all seeming, and that might have issued from any chimney of any honest mountaineer living thereabouts.

And that was precisely what the wily old distiller had thought when he put a torch to the dry brush under the copper worm and sent that line of purple out to make acquaintance with the grayish mists. And so the watchers in the hollow might have thought, but for the directions Grim had given them, and which were spread out now before them on the leaves.

"It is smoke," one of the watchers declared, and his voice vibrated exultingly; as though among the purple and scarlet October leaves he had found occasion to announce—"It is a gold mine!" "It is smoke; and look!" He ran his

finger along the written directions and read aloud in that half whisper that had become a habit with him during his last month's service:

"'To the left of a large ledge projecting above the surrounding peaks of the mountain, and to the right of a flat, white-looking stone; between the stone and the ledge; near, and to the right of a tall, blasted pine tree may be seen the smoke from Bentley's still, of a fair day, when the mists are not too heavy or too blue.'"

"Well, the mists are evidently just right to-day, a grayish white. And yonder is the ledge, 'The Lion's Head,' he called it, to the right of us. On the left is the flat-looking stone. There is the blasted pine, and right there between them is the line of blue smoke. All just as that rascally Grim promised when he sold out his friends for ten dollars. Boys, we're in for it."

"Not so loud, Jackson," said one of the others. "Remember, it isn't Grim's neck that is in danger now, but our own lives. That makes the two we're after. Since Dawson has been located for three weeks, we were only

waiting until the old fox got the thing into operation again, so that we could seize him while operating it. Now, since it's done, what next?"

"Next," said Jackson, "I am going straight back to town and tell the chief we've found them. I reckon they will not laugh at us this time. He'll give us a force to come back with to-morrow night, for the thing must be done at once. I suppose he will take in old Martin on the way down, though that little concern hasn't troubled us overly much. It's the big game we've been trying to bring down. I tell you, boys, we've done this pretty well. The day of the gander-pulling I thought it was all up, for awhile."

"And I always will believe, Charley, that it was your walnut juice gave us away. You forgot to dye one eyebrow; didn't he, Ligon?"

"One eyebrow and two lashes," laughed Ligon. "They say a mountaineer can detect a revenue fellow if one whisker is left uncolored."

"Now, boys," said Jackson, "this isn't any

time for joking. I admit there was a stray lock peeping out from under my wig; at least I think so, because I saw that fellow Jarvis looking at it so intently that I pulled my hat down over my head more snugly, and just about that time that old horn broke things up. I don't know how I ever did get the wig off without being seen, for it wasn't two minutes before Dawson was looking around for me with his knife. But if anybody saw me it was Jarvis. He didn't matter, because I whispered in his ear who I was the very first hour I set foot at the settlement. I had been told the old fellow kept a still tongue."

"You had been told that he wouldn't lie for you, either," said Ligon. "So if he had been questioned he would probably have told all about you."

"That he wouldn't," said Jackson. "I know men too well for that. When a man won't lie he has some honor, lots of it. I put the old fellow on his at the outset. A man like that will die for his honor, at the same time

that he wouldn't tell a lie to save the other fellow's life. I don't believe he would have allowed them to attack me in his store, either, for you know what Grim said: 'He's at peace with all men, an' a peaceable liver, but he can fight like ol' scratch ef he's minded.' But this isn't a time to talk. We must get to work. Now, boys, I am going to snake it through these woods and carry the good news to the chief. We don't care to tackle these toughs alone. If you boys want to wait till night—"

"That's just what we do," said Ligon. "One head is enough to risk at one time, isn't it, Combs?"

"I'm willing to wait till dark," said Combs, "but I'm ready for marching orders, too. This is Jackson's job; I'm ready to obey Jackson."

"Nonsense," said Jackson. "You've both done as much as I have, and done it better; for it was I stirred up all the fuss at the gander-pulling."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Ligon. "I distrust the old woman who 'hadn't seen so

many lawyer mens.' But go on, Jackson, what else?"

"I was going to say, you boys wait until it grows dark, then go on to the Half Way House and get a good sleep to-morrow. I will carry the diagram and directions down and go over them with the boss to-night, explain the plan we have agreed upon, and come on to meet you at the Half Way to-morow evening. How does that suit you? We take Dawson's first, early in the evening, too late for the news to spread, yet early enough to give us time to skirt the mountain side to Bentley's before midnight. Is that right?"

"Yes," said Ligon, "tell him that Bentley's is ten miles or more from Dawson's, the route we will be obliged to take. But that there is a secret trail leading from Bentley's house to his still, large enough for a small wagon to travel. We can follow that coming back and go straight on down the mountain with our prisoners. Tell him there are four at Dawson's and that there are five at Bentley's: four

men and a boy. Are you sure you will know the paths and the exact locality by night, Jackson?"

Jackson laughed:

"I haven't been hugging these hills four weeks for nothing," said he. "I know 'em like a fox."

"Well, be sure that you travel them 'like a fox,'" said Ligon, "and be doubly sure you keep a covert ready to run into, my boy: the hunters are pretty wary in this vicinity just now. Luck to you."

Jackson waved his hand silently, and a moment later he had disappeared among the close, rustling tangles of laurel.

That night, under cover of darkness, Ligon and Combs crept away through the woods to the house on the First Bench, where they had a cold supper at midnight and went at once to bed.

It was noon of the following day when they were awakened with a summons to dinner, and with the information that the chief had arrived

with a mounted posse of five men, among whom was Jackson.

They ate a hurried dinner, and were soon in the saddle: for the road they expected to take to Dawson's would carry them many miles away from the still before it finally brought them to it.

They were to skirt the mountain for some two miles, then cut into a dry creek bed for about two more; that being the only possible excuse for a road to be found until they should reach an old mill road, abandoned when the mill ceased to be operated a half-dozen years before. Here they expected to begin the ascent again, following this old road until within a mile of Dawson's still, where they had decided to picket their horses and travel afoot to the place of attack.

Thanks to Grim, they understood that the still was located in the old mill that stood on the bank of a noisy little stream which would deaden all sound of their approach.

They were also instructed that the mill would

present every appearance of a grist mill in full operation, except, perhaps, that the wheel would be stationary : the miller, it might be, would be resting from his grinding, in the mill door. There would be sacks of grain scattered about the door, too, although for many a day the only visitors to the old mill were those who brought jugs instead of meal sacks.

On reaching the creek bed the chief had divided his men, and detached two of them to go on to the neighborhood of Bentley's; with instructions to look over the ground thoroughly, and to keep an eye on Bentley as much as possible without exposing themselves to danger from discovery.

"And be sure you look out for the boy," said he. "The fellow Grim gave special notice of a boy connected with this gang : a dangerous character."

The men, one of whom was Combs, set out for Bentley's, and the rest of the posse passed on down the dry bed of the creek for Dawson's. The chief gave explicit orders that nobody was

to speak a word to any one they might chance to meet along the road :

"We will take no chances on that," he declared. "These people are far too shrewd and too suspicious for us to venture any kind of acquaintance with them. You will just ride straight ahead, in silence."

It seemed a needless order : the posse had ridden all the afternoon without meeting a living soul. They rode the length of the creek bed, to the point where it touched the old mill road and began the ascent of the mountain. Here another road leading to a little settlement two miles distant crossed the old mill road, and there, in the very centre of the crossing roads, stood an old woman, a gaunt, toothless old crone, with a brush between her gums, who stood staring at them over an armful of gray warp that she was lugging home for a hit-or-miss rag carpet. There was a sleepy look in the little old black eyes fixed upon the posse, as though their owner but half comprehended that those strong, sturdy horses straining their

backs under their burdens were carrying men, real men, such as she had seen every day of her life. Not a word was spoken. If the men saw the stupid old woman they gave no sign; there wasn't even a chance for the customary "howdy," which the mountaineer is ever ready to offer.

The men kept their eyes upon the broad back of the chief riding stolidly along in front of the line. There was something suggestive of the brave old German, Blücher, in the droop of those massive shoulders, no less than in the sturdy pushing on to meet the dangers ahead. Perhaps, too, there was not lacking some of the wisdom of the proud old Prussian as well; for no sooner had the posse passed than the expression of the old woman's face changed; the sleepy eyes flashed. The old crone chuckled:

"Them mens air up to somethin'," said she to the gray warp. "They ain't revernuers, howsomever. They're too glumsome for revernuers. Revernuers air mostly too friendly. I know 'em soon's I scent 'em; can't fool Polly

Martin. My gran'dad allers said I had a nose for revernuers."

It was indeed old Mrs. Martin, going home from Yarbrough's store, where she had been to trade for some warp for her weaving the next week. She had no suspicion that the straight young fellow, riding so demurely at the heels of the grim leader of the posse, was the same for whom she had sounded the alarm only a few short weeks before. She had her opinion, however, though she did not express it until they had passed beyond range of her sharp little black eyes.

"They're up to somethin'," said she. "Them mens air sholy up to somethin'. Maybe it's the sheriff huntin' o' someun; or maybe it's a mob; else thar's a big camp-meetin' goin' on somewhars on the mount'n."

The sun swung over the verge of the bluff, a blood-red ball of fire it looked. Night was ready to drop down upon the valley, already wrapped in the shadows of twilight. The tips of the tallest trees were scarlet; but in

the woods, under the shade of the dense old oaks, and pines, and hemlocks, it was dark when the posse dismounted and picketed their horses.

Then they separated, in order to surround the mill and cut off escape; for the object of the service is, not so much the destruction of the property as the punishment of the offenders; and Dawson was a wiry old fellow that had been wanted for a long time, to answer for the offense of illegal distilling.

Not a word was spoken. Each man understood that he carried his own life and the lives of his comrades in his hand; a misstep, an unguarded whisper, and all would be lost.

The old mill stood picturesquely weird in the uncertain light; a red glow shone from within and streamed through the door, which stood wide upon its rusty hinges. It was a subdued glow, red and warm and mellow; a glow from the distiller's furnace, where some one had set the door ajar for a moment. There was a low sound of voices in careless conversa-

tion, mingled with the noisy rush of the stream hard by, bewailing, it might be, the mill's exchange of industries, or the silence of the great wheel, hanging useless, like a dead sentinel, above the fast hurrying current. Perhaps the little mountain stream felt its own abasement, and was singing a song of regret for the good old days when it helped to make the hoe-cakes for the little children, miles away among the mountains.

None of its regret, however, disturbed the group of idle men smoking before the door of the old mill, in happy ignorance of the stealthy figures creeping noiselessly upon them through the shadows of the forest. There were four of them, Dawson and his three confederates, seated there, distinctly visible, with the red glow of the furnace upon their backs.

Within the shanty could be seen the sacks of grain, as Grim had informed the officers they would find them. He had also instructed them that behind those sacks there were bushels and bushels of apples, and that under the mill floor there were barrels of brandy, new and old,

waiting for a safe transport to a certain place of sale, the name of which had never been intrusted to the informer.

The still was in full operation. Through the open door came the fumes of the half distilled liquor, powerfully condemning.

Dawson had just leaned forward to receive from one of the gang a lighted splinter with which to freshen the smouldering tobacco in his pipe, when—Hist!

The laurel parted all about them and a hasty "click!" "click!" followed by another and another, suddenly cut the silence with deadly meaning.

The sole of Dawson's heavy foot touched the ground, but before he could rise, the muzzle of a pistol was pressed against his forehead. The voice of the chief, not loud, but thoroughly distinct and fearfully in earnest, said:

"Surrender! all of you!"

The command was emphasized by the gleaming barrels of the deputies standing in the full glare of the furnace's light.

Only one man attempted to get his hand to his belt, but a weapon at his head put a sudden stop to the faint resistance.

"There isn't the slightest use, men," said the chief. "We are all around you. You had better surrender quietly."

They did. Not a shot was fired. The surprise had been complete. The distillers stepped out, one by one, and laid down their arms.

They remained under guard while the brandy was emptied upon the ground and the still destroyed. Then two of the posse were detached to march the prisoners down to the county seat, and ere long the old mill was left to the shadows, to the rats, and to the lamentations of the murmuring stream hurrying past it to find the more placid current of the Calf Killer, miles away, beyond the mountain.

And then, when the prisoners were fairly started, the chief and his remaining deputies headed their horses for Bentley's.

As they swept by in the moonlight, one of the

men who was guarding the prisoners called out to them:

"Be sure you get the boy. Grim said there was a boy; the sharpest little wildcatter in the lot."

The "sharpest little wildcatter" meant Joe. Grim had planned his revenge nicely.

CHAPTER V

THE MOONSHINER'S HOME

WILD and picturesque is the Blue Spring; and the Falls, with their prismatic lights—where the waters of the Spring go tumbling over the bluff to the basin a hundred feet below—which have won for them the name of "The Rainbow Falls."

A magnificent hiding place was the Rainbow. The beautiful Falls, that should have served no baser purpose than to show forth the wonderful handiwork of the Master, was made to serve the distillers in their illicit work. For midway the great bluff and far back under the overhanging rocks a cavity opens. In the centre of the roof a spring trickles down into an old, rotted trough, and beyond the trough into a basin bottomed with bright, pinkish pebbles. A great heap of stones tells where a fur-

nace has been; these, with the remnants of a twisted, copper worm, proclaim all too plainly the service the beautiful cataract was made to perform. Falling from the bluff above, it made for Elijah Bentley a most effective screen as he plied his unlawful trade, back under the cavity and behind the Falls.

Others were raided; others still grew restless and uneasy and finally moved away or gave up the business as one too full of risks; to old Bentley, however, danger seemed a thing not to be feared.

Secure indeed did he feel as he sat behind the watery veil and smoked his after-dinner pipe to the music of the hounds, in open pack in the cove below. Yet the illicit establishment was doomed, despite old Bentley's feeling of security.

One night he sat smoking on the doorstep of his cabin, a half-mile distant, waiting for his supper, which his old mother-in-law was preparing over the fire of logs and pine knots blazing in the great black-mouthed fireplace. The blaze

lent an air of comfort to the room despite its scant proportions and coarse furnishings. A pot swung from an iron hook over the fire; a skillet with cover surmounted by a heap of glowing coals occupied one corner of the capacious hearth, while a griddle from the other side sent up savory odors of broiling bacon. An old woman, wearing a short petticoat of homespun, was flitting here and there over the hearth. Yet, while she made all possible haste, the man on the doorstep grumbled and growled and swore under his breath, and wondered "how long he would be getting his grub."

He was a rough looking man, tall, with shoulders square enough to have borne the burdens of life honestly, without resort to unlawful callings. A beard, rough and unkempt, covered his face and lost itself in the masses of uncut hair that fell about his ears and eyes. He wore boots of stout calfskin that reached to his knees and there received the brown jeans pantaloons tucked into their capacious tops, against the dust and dews of the mountain walks. His

waist was encircled by a broad leather belt, into which was thrust a pair of old-fashioned horse pistols. A gun rested against the wall, where he had placed it while waiting for his supper.

While he sat thus, smoking and grumbling, there came a slight, cautious stir among the laurel bushes outside.

"Hist!"

He cautioned the old woman to silence, while his keen eye peered into the shadowy growth, his fingers fumbling for the pistols at his belt. The next moment two stalwart figures emerged from the shadow and cautiously approached within radius of the firelighted doorway. Bentley muttered a low growl.

"Well," said he, slipping the weapon hurriedly back into its place, "ain't you two bright ones! Come slippin' up here like a pair o' horse thieves. I like ter put a bullet into your heads. Ain't you got no sense, slippin' up to my house at night in sech a manner? Didn't you know I'd shoot?"

"That's what I told Jake," said one of the

men, a middle-aged man with smoothly shaven face, and hair of thin iron gray. "I allowed we'd just better step up, so. But Jake he allowed different. He allowed as revenuers always tried that dodge, and we'uns had better be keerful. That's what Jake allowed."

"Jake be blowed," said Bentley. "That thar red head o' his ain't stuffed none too full o' sense, as I can see. You little chicken—"

"Let up thar, will you!" The challenge rang out from beardless lips, yet the hardened old sinner quailed for an instant, and instinctively felt for the pistol at his belt. "Drap that!" commanded the same voice. "I ain't afeard o' you, Lige Bentley, an' you can't skeer me, neither. If I aim ter come here friendly I allow I have the right; if I choose ter come keerful, 'stead o' makin' a targit o' my figur for every chance raider hid in the brush, I reckon I have that right. Now you hold you jaw; reckerlect thar's them can shoot as peart, an' may be as true, as you, with all your braggin'. Set back thar, will you?"

Bentley dropped back into his seat silently. The old woman, meanwhile, had hurried the supper on the table. She knew better than to interfere with her son's quarrels, yet she understood something of the art of interference in a peaceable way, too. She stepped to the door, as seemingly unconcerned as though she had heard nothing of the disturbance.

"Supper's on the table, Lige," she said. "You-uns can come an' eat it."

Bentley knocked the ashes from his pipe and laid it upon the water shelf. He, too, had decided to ignore the fuss. The quick-headed mountaineer, Underwood, allowed his gun to slip through the palms of his hands until the stock rested upon his boot. Bentley understood that hostilities were withdrawn; he stood aside and motioned the visitors to enter. The younger acted as spokesman. He was beardless Jake Underwood, a partner in the illicit still.

"We-uns have had our supper," said he, "but we'll wait out here till you swallow yours, an' then we'll walk back ter the still with you."

They both carried guns, and under their belts the occasional glimmer of a blade was visible when the firelight fell upon their stalwart figures. Desperadoes both, yet there was about the younger of the two, a something softer than the exterior warranted, when he glanced at the old woman ; or sometimes when he spoke to the boy, Joe, who hauled the fruit to the cave and did other odd jobs at the command of his father, Bentley. The two stepped back into the shadow and waited ; conversing, if at all, in whispers that did not reach the ear of Bentley, who sat down, thankless and sullen, to his supper of bacon and dry beans, and fell again to grumbling.

He ate, not ravenously, but so rapidly that his eating had the appearance of greed. Finally he stopped, and, looking over his half-lifted knife, said to his mother :

"Whar's Joe?"

The old woman answered with fear and trembling :

"Joey allowed he didn't want any supper," said she.

"Whar is he?" said Bentley. "Answer a plain question, if you're able. If you ain't, I'll set about seein' if I can find him."

The old grandmother endeavored to appear indifferent.

"Oh, well," said she, "if you air bent on knowin' where he is, why, he's in the loft. The child ware took with misery in his head, an' he ware that fagged I let him go up the ladder and rest a bit."

"'Rest!'" sneered Bentley. "An' what's he been a-doin' of to be needin' rest, I'd like to know? He'd better hurry up an' fetch that load of apples to the Blue Spring; that's the kind o' restin' he better be up ter. If them apples ain't thar by sun up I'll engage ter take the mis'ry out o' his head an' put it in his back. You can tell him that with my compl'mints."

He ate on, greedily, as animals eat; to satisfy their hunger, without a thought of thanksgiving or a throb of gratitude. At length he called to the men upon the doorstep:

"Bill," said he, "what's stirrin' at the still?"

The man shuffled uneasily

"Well," said he, "I aimed to tell you as we walked back."

"But I aims to know now," said Bentley, in a tone which proclaimed the brawny distiller lord of his domain. His henchmen evidently recognized his power and respected it.

"Well," said the man addressed as Bill, "I ain't heard nothin' partic'lar stirrin' ter the still, but over at Jube Jarvis's store 'Lihu Hudgins allowed it ware gittin' pretty hot for distillin' in these parts."

"So it be," said Bentley; "any baby could tell you that. Pretty tolerble hot for them as don't kiver up their tracks."

"An'," continued Bill, "Budd Dawson's was raided to-night."

"I allowed he would be," said the mountaineer, nothing daunted, as he emptied his glass of cider. "He let every sort go to his place with no more guaranty than a promise not to tell whar it ware hid."

"An'," said Bill, "some boys over in the

cove sent word to us to-night to lie low. Some of our boys."

Instantly the moonshiner pushed back his chair, rose, gathered his gun in his brown hands and joined the men on the outside. Silently the three fell into step, and with long, hasty strides crossed the yard, keeping, from habit, close under the shadow of the gaunt old cedars that studded the little enclosure. Halfway across Bentley stopped, and called back to the woman in the cabin:

"Tell that thar youngster to be at the Rainbow with that thar load o' apples by sun up if he wants to save his hide an' tallow."

Was it fancy or did something stir in the laurel, further back, beyond the cedars? Was it a footstep creeping back into the denser shadow? A figure of a man? Another and another, cowering under the thick stunted growth? Was it the glitter of a rifle that flashed for a moment across the little clearing, disappearing in the laurel thicket? The distillers paused, held their breath a moment and passed on.

"A rabbit, I reckin," said Bentley.

"Sounds mightily like a step," said Jake Underwood. "Yes, sir, like half a dozen of 'em," he added, with a low, mirthless laugh.

"Shut up, will you?" said Bentley. "You air enough, betwixt you, to give a fellow the aguy. Takin' fright at a rabbit, an' such. Wonder, now, if you wouldn't run from a mouse?"

The men offered no further opinion. After all, they stood in a sort of terror of Bentley that cowed them and at the same time quieted their fears of other dangers. There was a kind of bravado about him which they mistook for courage, as people of their class and circumstances are wont to do.

Only the old woman they had left in the cabin was not deceived by it. There was an innate integrity about her that shone out and scintillated even in the den into which fate had cast her. Not for one instant did she mistake Bentley's braggadocio and foolhardiness for bravery. She had seen courage, and was ready

to recognize it always. Truly, fate had decreed her hard lines, but she considered if only she could make the difference plain to the young lad sleeping in the loft over-head, she would not count her life wholly vain.

"He's a good boy, Joe is," she said, as she set away the remnants of the supper. "He's a good boy an' I aims to teach him the rights an' wrongs o' things, if the good Lord spares me."

She stepped to the cabin door, to listen for any sound of loitering footsteps. Once she fancied something stirred ; a shadow crossed the yard ; and a moment later the sound of cautious footsteps scrambling down the bluff in the rear of the house.

"A deer," she said to herself, "or else some o' the settlement boys takin' the secret path to the still-house. How I do hate that thar path. It's mighty nigh been the ruin o' me and mine."

When all was still again she tip-toed to the ladder leading to the loft, placed her hands upon the lower rungs and began to mount.

The window shutter stood wide open, and

through it the moonlight fell in broad, silver patches upon the floor. By its light she found the pallet in the corner, under the low eaves, and stood a moment gazing down upon the thin, brown face of the young sleeper lying there among the quilts her hands had fashioned. Then, kneeling, she touched him lightly upon the shoulder. The weary fellow did not move; he was sound asleep, utterly exhausted. The grandmother laid her hand upon his head, pushing back the heavy masses of hair from the smooth, hot forehead. He stirred at the gentle touch, and opened his eyes.

"What is it, granny?" he asked; "is anything the matter at the still?"

"Anything at the still?" That was the burden of his days and of hers; the fear that lay ever upon their hearts, chilling the warm flow of life.

"No, thar ain't anything as I knows on. I come to see if maybe you couldn't eat a bite, son. I have kept it back, a nice supper for you, warm in the oven."

"No'm," said Joe, "I ain't hungry to-night. I just allowed I'd rest some before time to haul the apples. I ware that tired, looked like I couldn't move."

Again the worn old hand caressed the dark head tenderly.

"I know it, son. I know you air tired. You're worked to death mighty nigh. Granny'd help you if she could. I don't want to rob you of your rest, but it's kinder lonesome-like downstairs, an' I feel sort o' cur'us about the still. Somehows I can't make out to rest for thinkin' about it. The hounds have been howlin' awful, too. I'd allowed maybe as your pappy's gone you'd let me fix you a pallet down thar an' you'd take your rest as well maybe, before the warm fire."

Instantly Joe rose, leaning heavily upon one elbow; he was weary and sick, yet the first hint of her need of him was enough to arouse him to an effort to please her. His head ached, and there was a thumping in his ears like the thundering of the Blue Creek over the bluff on a

stormy night. Half-way down the ladder he tottered and caught at the hand put out to stay him.

"Air the mis'ry that bad, son?" his grandmother asked, with anxious voice.

"It's pretty bad," said Joe, as he sank in a chair and dropped his head in his hands.

For a brief moment the two were silent; they were very dear to each other, the old woman and the young boy, understanding each other's needs and sharing each other's hardships. A similar fate had fostered in them similar sympathies.

"Granny," said Joe, after a long pause, "sometimes I almost think it ain't worth while to try."

She looked up at him with a startled expression in the faded old eyes, yet all she said was:

"Joey!" in that wounded, hurt way that never failed to appeal to him.

"I don't mean as I ain't goin' to try," said Joe. "For your sake, granny, I am goin' to keep on, but I reckon it air all for your sake."

"An' for your own, son," said granny. "A boy must always do the best that's in him for his own sake; for the sake of his conscience an' his hereafter. Always remember that, son; thar's that to be endured an' done always for the sake o' them that love us, or that we-uns love; an' thar's something must be done for a body's own sake. We have got to make the best of what the good Lord gives us."

She always quieted and encouraged him by her quiet forbearance and unswerving faith, yet the way seemed rough indeed to the overworked boy.

"I don't appear to have much chance," he said with a sigh. "Just no showin' at all."

The old woman got up and began gathering the pillows off a bed that stood in a corner of the room; then she spread a black bearskin before the fire and proceeded to lay the pillows upon it, making a warm, comfortable pallet. Once she paused in her work and looking at the listless figure in the chair, said:

"I reckon we-uns don't always know what a

chance may be when we see it. I see a lily once, growin' in a mud hole—"

Joe said nothing, yet the beauty of the thought was not wholly lost upon him. When the pallet was ready he stretched himself upon it, and lay in the warm glow of the fire, thinking of the lily, while his grandmother plied her knitting needles. After a long silence he said, dreamily, as though unconscious he was speaking:

"Some one must a-dropped a seed thar, I reckon."

"Whar?" said granny; she had forgotten about the lily.

"Why, in the mud hole," said Joe. "Some one must a-dropped a seed thar, an' the lily come of it, I'm thinkin'."

"Maybe so," said the old woman, "else the winds fetched it. Anyhow, it was thar, an' growin' pretty as you ever see, spick an' span an' clean, as though it was h'isted on top of the bigges' mountain hereabouts. I ware plumb pleased to see it; it ware like a sermont,

mighty nigh. An' it almost seemed to say it could keep itself clean spite of the mud about it. I always think of that lily when I see youuns drug off to that thar hole in the bluff whar the laws of the State air broke, and the laws o' God A'mighty trompled under foot."

As the heat struck through the boy's chilled and thinly clad body, and the warm blood began to circulate more quickly, the pain in his head became less severe, his languor disappeared and Joe began to talk more freely.

"Granny," said he, "guess what I done to-day?"

"I dunno what you done to-day," said granny, "but I know you works too steady; that's what I know."

"This wasn't work," said Joe. "It was just fun. I made a latch for the big gate, that will open and shut for a touch. I made it up myse'f; all out of my own head. Jube Jarvis, from the settlement, stopped to see it as he ware passin', and let on as how I might get a patent for it if I ware minded to try. I ain't carin' for

no patent; all I care for is makin' the thing up."

"You air workin' too steady," insisted granny. "When I see you bendin' over that thar chist, so happy an' contented it makes you forgit you air tired, I knows you air workin' too steady an' a-killin' of yourse'f."

Joe's eyes flashed for an instant:—

"Does it make you feel any better to see me haulin' apples to a wildcat still before daybreak of a mornin'?" said he. "I tell you, granny, when I mount that thar cart an' sneak off through the woods, snake-like, in the shadow, I feel like a thief. But when I'm at that chist, I plumb forget the still, an' the smell of the b'ilin' liquor, an' the crunchin' of apples in the mill. I forget ole Kit an' the wagin' creepin' along under the dark of the trees. I forget ev'rything but the things beggin' of me to make 'em; to turn 'em out with my tools. I'll do it some day, granny; you'll see."

The old woman listened, pleased in spite of herself. She had always felt as if the boy were

indeed her own since the day his dying mother had given him into her keeping, begging her as far as possible to shield him from his father. Bentley had dragged the boy into service when he was too small, indeed, to do more than gather up the apples from under the trees in the orchard. Yet, drudge though he was, Joe worked with tolerable patience so long as he was permitted, at odd hours, the use of the tools, which, with the help of Jube Jarvis he had been able to collect. And, indeed, it was not the work itself, but the nature of the work that he objected to at the still. He was ignorant of the great mysterious law of conscience; yet, in the heart of the lonely boy among the hills of Tennessee, conscience, that defier of circumstance and of conditions, had made for herself an abode.

The fire burned low in the black fireplace; the flickering blaze cast shadows, fitful and unreal, upon the face pressed against the pillow; the great logs fell apart; the grandmother's knitting needles no longer clicked; only the low breath-

ing of the sleeping boy broke the stillness of the room. Then the baying of a hound, far away in a copse below, sounded upon the night; nearer and nearer, until the old grandmother awoke with a start and began to knit vigorously for a moment, in the dark. Then, fully awake, she called softly :—

"Joey? Air you'uns asleep, son?"

"No'm," was the answer. "I ware noddin' some, but the hound woke me up. I ware lyin' here thinkin' about that last time I druv ole Kit ter the still. I ware not right gentle with her, I reckon. Poor ole Kitty; her an' me have had some tolerable hard licks I'm thinkin.'

"The last time I druv her over to the Blue Spring with a load of apples she appeared poorly; leastways she wouldn't go fast enough to pleasure me, who ware honin' to get back to that tool chist. So I just lit off that thar load an' cut a poplar saplin', thinkin' to tetch her up a bit. But the first lick I give her the critter turned an' give me such a look! My! my! I can't ever furgit that look. I just turned an'

flung that thar saplin' over the bluff an' asked ole Kit's pardon like a man. I couldn't for the life of me, granny, help thinkin' o' that other mule critter the parson told about over at meetin' onc't. The one as turned round an' talked to the prophet as was tryin' to drive her into the wrong place. My ! how that thar hound do bark; he must a-treed somethin'."

Ah ! had he known, had he guessed, what it was the old dog had "treed," he would not have been lying there dreaming in the semi-darkness with that contented look upon his face, as he talked of Balaam and his ass. The fire died in the big fireplace; the room grew dark. The boy dropped to sleep again, and the grandmother stole off to her bed in the corner. It was still dark when Joe awoke and slipped noiselessly out the door. As he laid the gear upon the mule's back, he said:

"I hope thar ain't many more loads like this for you an' me, Kitty." He paused. Far away to the east a faint red flush streaked the sky; young birds were chirruping in their nests; the

gorge, wrapped in its mantle of mist, bluer than the blue heavens at noonday, lay at his feet; the spell of the place and the hour was upon him.

"I wish," said he, "I wish to heaven this ware the last trip; the very last, for you an' me. I wish that thar fog would never have to hide me from the eye of man again. I wish it!"

Did the mists laugh? Was the breath of the old beast against his cheek an "amen!" to that rash but fervent wish? For a moment Joe was almost startled.

"It sounded like a prayer almost," said he. Then he bounded lightly to the mule's back, a mode of riding common among the young drivers of those mountain carts, and chirruped softly. But instantly he dropped the lines, and, stretching himself almost flat upon the mule's back, craned forward in an effort to pierce the mists. Something was coming up the secret trail; footsteps, and voices without any attempt at silence or concealment. Frightened, startled as he was, Joe thought of the hound whose baying he had

heard in the night, and at the same moment there flashed through his memory a recollection of his own rash wish that this might be his last trip to the still under the bluff.

With scarcely a breath he slipped from the mule's back, as the steps came nearer and the voices became more distinct. Instantly he knew the secret trail was a secret no longer; something whispered him the old law-breaking days were over and done with; yet, the moment had its terrors, its dangers. Scarcely daring to breathe, he crouched low upon his face under the mule's belly, while the officers passed so near he could have put out his hand and touched them.

Thank God for the mists, the friendly mists, hiding him, indeed, for "the last time" from the eye of man!

CHAPTER VI

BEHIND THE RAINBOW FALLS

Among the shadows of the laurel, scarcely fifty feet from Bentley's door, two figures had been crouching for hours. At last the cabin door opened, and another figure, a big burly mountaineer, stood a moment in the lighted doorway before dropping down upon the step, to smoke his pipe and wait grumblingly for his supper.

The moon shone resplendent, but it was the firelight behind his big, broad back that made distinct the figure upon the doorstep. One of the watchers in the brush touched the sleeve of his companion:

"That's him," he whispered, "that's Bentley himself. He is at home for his supper, I dare say."

"Then," whispered the other, "we had as well

go on; queer the chief lost that diagram, but Jackson said he could lead the others to the spot if you could direct me; can you do it, Combs?"

"No, not by moonlight. I thought I could, but I am all turned around to-night. We must just trail the old beast to his lair; that's all we can do. But there's the boy Grim mentioned, we mustn't forget to look out for him. I haven't seen any boy; have you?"

"No, but Jackson saw one at the store several times while he was out reconnoitring. He thinks it might be the one we are after. In fact Grim intimated as much."

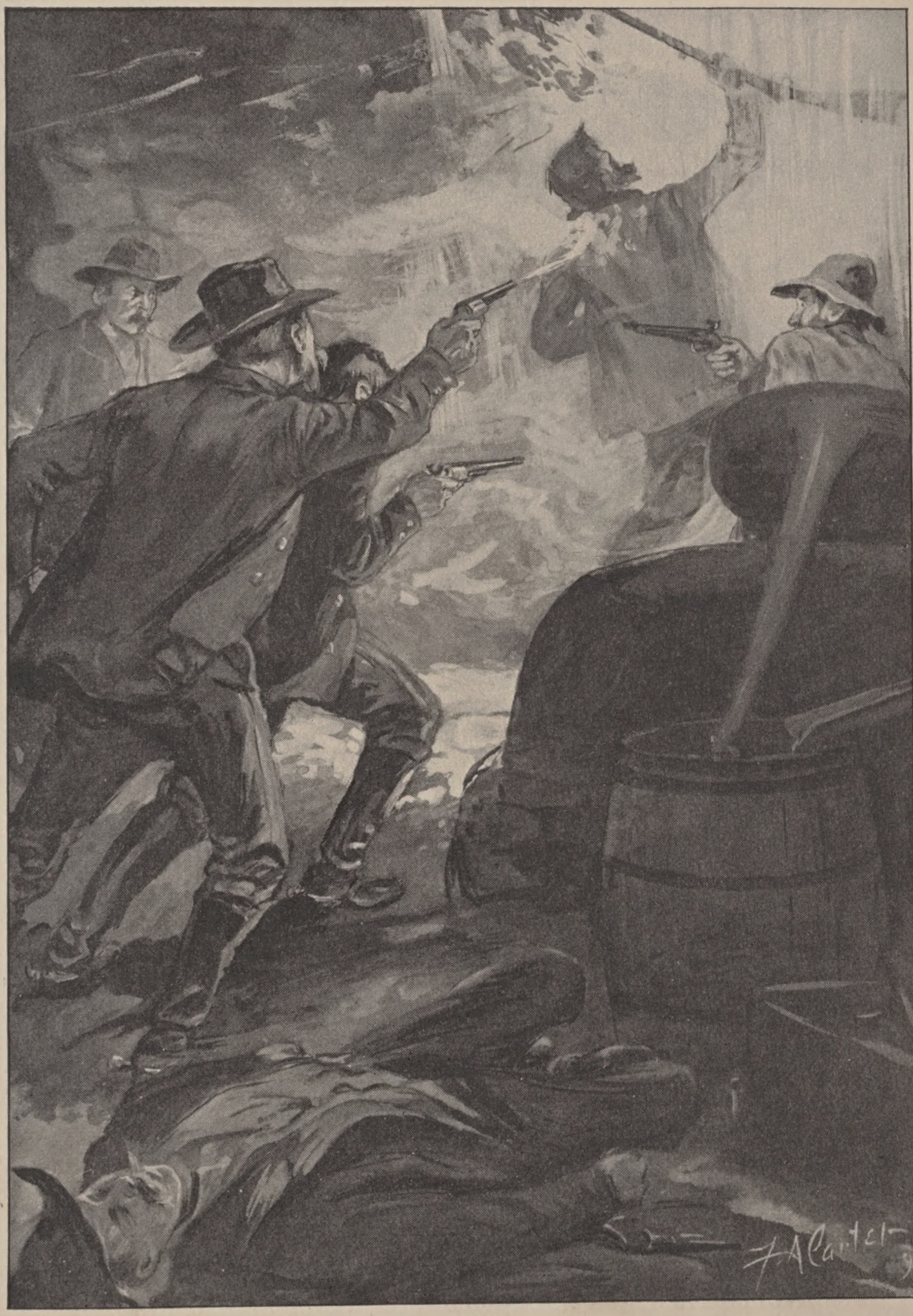
"Said he was 'sharp as a briar,' too. Hush! some one is coming."

There were cautious steps among the shadows on the other side of the lighted clearing before the door. A moment later two other figures advanced stealthily toward the figure upon the step.

"His confederates," whispered Combs. "Must have gotten wind of the raid on Daw-

son; sh-h, lie low there! They are quarreling about something. Listen."

They crouched closer to the earth, fairly hugging the ground, as the moon climbed higher in the heavens and the laurels became more and more insecure. From the doorstep came the sound of voices, guarded but angry; evidently the old distiller and his confederates were not on the best of terms this evening. After awhile the older man got up and went in to his supper while the others waited outside. The chief's deputies waited also, crouched among the shadows, afraid to stir lest some stray moonbeam should direct the eyes of the wary distillers to their hiding place. At last Bentley pushed back his chair and, shouldering his gun, joined the men on the doorstep, and the three passed like shadows across the little moonlighted yard, disappearing down the secret trail to the still. The shadows among the laurel arose and followed without the slightest hesitation; although they understood they might at any moment step into some trap set for their undoing.



SHOT FOLLOWED SHOT
(Page 136)

They had walked for nearly a mile when the tramp suddenly ended. There was a sound of water; a rich, round gurgle at first, and softened by distance; then as they drew nearer, the full, round roar of the cataract tumbling from the bluff. The next moment they saw it, a sheet of white, a dash of frothy silver in the moonlight, against which the figures of the three distillers stood out like giant silhouettes. There was no necessity for whispering now, the cataract drowned all other sounds.

"This is the place," said Combs. "The still is directly here, somewhere. Don't take your eye off those men for an instant; watch that big fellow there; that's Bentley, you know. Don't lose sight of them—"

Did the earth open and swallow them? Without one step from the spot on which they were standing, seemingly without one step forward, the distillers had disappeared. The deputies clutched each other in silence; they were so close that each could hear the breathing of the other above the noise of the cataract.

What had become of the distillers? This was the question trembling upon their lips, when a hand reached from the shadow and tapped Combs upon the shoulder lightly. "Be quiet," said the chief's voice, "and step further back into the shadow. The boys are back here. The distillers are behind that waterfall. How they got there is the question we are trying to decide. Jackson is over there now trying to find the entrance to the cave; for evidently there is a cave back there."

They stepped back into the denser shadows, near enough, however, to keep watch on the waterfall in case the law-breakers should leave before the plans for attack should be perfected. The chief peered into the brake more than once to ascertain if the brave young deputy might be in sight. At last he came, his finger upon his lips, motioning silence. The posse drew their heads together and listened while he explained the situation of the cascade and its curiously hidden cave. "There is a cascade above," said he; "a long, swift current that

tumbles over a jagged rock bed before it makes the final plunge over the bluff. There is a cave behind the fall; the best concealed one I ever saw. I failed to find the slightest opening until a moment since, when the three distillers dropped seemingly into the earth. There are four or five of them in there, however, and there is death behind there for somebody. When they disappeared I searched the spot. All I found was a curious little step, right into the waterfall. One would suppose to step into it would be to go down a hundred feet into that still-looking pool of blackish water. I didn't see the step; I merely tried it. I thought if they could take it I could, and I did. But first I put my ear to the rocks above on the left side of the cave, and I could hear them talking. They are either drinking, or else they count upon the noise of the fall to drown their voices, for they are evidently not trying to speak low. On the contrary, they seem to be having rather a good time. The cave isn't deep, it is merely a sort of hollow, a room under the rocks, without, I believe, any

other opening than the one through the Fall. They are tough old customers, and we shall probably have a tussle before we take them. Bentley we will never take alive, unless we take him in a drunken stupor. I am at your service, sir." He turned to the chief and lifted his hat; he was quite ready to beard the lion in his lair if his superior so ordered.

But the chief had different plans. He drew his men further back into the shadow, but quite near enough to keep guard upon the entrance to the cave. He had decided to wait until midnight to make the attack; at that time the distillers would in all probability be drunk, or asleep, and off their guard.

The plan met with general approval.

"We shall probably get the boy, too, by waiting," said Jackson. "Grim said he generally came over awhile after midnight to relieve the others before day."

And while they waited, the distillers, not dreaming that they were caught like rats in a trap, were carousing the night away.

As the time wore on the jug circulated freely, and the big, red eye of the furnace gleamed; a sullen gleam that lighted up the faces of the distillers and drew their silhouettes as the moon had drawn them, in gigantic black pictures upon the wall of rocks.

And while the time slipped away the one pass to freedom was watched by the old chief and his dauntless young deputies. But the distillers were too drunk to care now. They sang, and drank again, with only the white foam of the water between them and the despised "revernuers." At midnight the revel ended. One of the men had fallen asleep with his head dropped back against the rocks. The furnace fire showed his face, blood red in the lurid glow. And, suddenly, while the young distiller slept, a strange form stepped down into the white spray of the water-fall; another, and yet another, until there were four. At last the officers stood within the long-sought illicit workshop of Elijah Bentley and his gang. There was not a sound until the chief clicked his weapon into cock; then—the distillers turned and—saw.

They rose, as one man, and grasped their guns, scattered over the floor of the cavern. They gave no more heed to the chief's order to surrender than they gave to the cataract tumbling from the rocks over their heads. The sleeper over against the wall suddenly awoke, sprang to his feet and fired recklessly into the crowd. The shot was promptly answered from the officers, firing into the air. For the chief had given orders that shooting should be done only for intimidation until orders were given to the contrary; and then only as a matter of defense.

But the moment the first shot was fired the distillers were wild. Shot followed shot, mingling with the rattle of falling stone, the roar of the water, and the chief's hurried commands to "surrender." In the midst of the confusion the big, burly figure of Bentley pressed forward; his eyes were bloodshot, and he breathed like an animal, brought to bay. He carried his gun, stock forward, as though about to present it to the deputy standing nearest him. The men

fell slightly back, awaiting the surrender of the leader, when, quick as a flash, the distiller whisked his weapon into position, and before the noise of the report had ceased to vibrate through the cavern the waiting deputy fell forward, dead.

Another shot instantly followed, but the wiry old wildcatter was too quick for them. With a cry of rage he turned and leaped into the cataract. As he went down the chief's bullet struck him, squarely between the shoulders, and a moment later the sound of his heavy body striking the pool far below could be heard above the confusion.

In the midst of the tumult some one banged the furnace door shut and the place was in darkness, save for the moonbeams falling through the water-curtain, showing the struggling figures about the cave's mouth.

When the struggle ended the chief cast up the result: he had destroyed the still and some fifteen barrels of brandy. He had a coat where he had expected to have a prisoner, the man having shed his garment and made good his

escape. He had wounded one man slightly, and another unto death; for Bentley, he knew, carried his death wound, if he had not been drowned in that terrible leap he had made. Jackson carried a bullet in his left arm, Combs had a gash across his face, while the fourth man lay back behind the waterfall, dead. The chief's hat had a bullet hole in the crown, showing how close had been his own danger.

But he was not ready to give up the battle.

"We must capture Bentley," said he. "If he is alive we must carry him back with us; at all events, we must be sure he is dead. Those fellows are merely hid out in the woods. I am going to take one of you boys with me to the settlement. Grim said there was a man there who had a couple of fairly trained bloodhounds."

"Fox hounds, captain," said Combs. "And I think you'll have a hard time getting them, too. These fellows are not any too ready to help run each other down."

"He said," said Jackson, "that they were 'fox hounds with a blood streak in them,' and I

am for getting them. If we fail we will at least have a chance at the boy Grim mentioned."

Reaching the settlement, they found they needed ammunition and the chief ordered the storekeeper called up. Mr. Jarvis heard only such an account of the raid as they chose to give. It was none of his business, and so he asked no questions. Had he done so, the question burning in his heart, must have sprung to his lips: "Had they trapped Joe?" The question was unexpectedly answered without his asking; the chief had received his ammunition and was turning away when he stopped and looked the storekeeper in the eye:

"Do you know anything about a boy connected with this business?"

Farewell to the brave old boast of the man who "lied for nobody." Had there been a moment for thought perhaps it might have been different; but there was not. Yet, between the officer's question and his own reply, the storekeeper felt that he had undone the principles of a lifetime. Truth to him was not a hobby, but

a grandly magnificent principle; something that made radiant an humble and obscure life. Yet, to the chief's question he replied:

"Thar ain't any boy connected with it."

"What boy was that at the store the other day, some of my men were here?"

"My boy. Grim had a grudge against him, that's all. Boy tried to lick him once; that's all thar was to it."

"Where is he now?'

"At home, in bed."

The fact that it never once occurred to the officer to doubt him rendered the lie he had spoken only the more detestable to old Jube. He felt that he had not only spoken an untruth, but that he had betrayed the confidence of men. He heard the hoofs of the horses galloping back to the scene of the late struggle; there was no need of secrecy now. When the last sound of the hoofs had died away, down the sandy road, the storekeeper turned back to the counter where he had lately stood with his midnight customers. His face wore a troubled expression. "I told

a lie," said he. "A common lie." He leaned upon the counter, his chin in his palm.

"He's a little feller—no mammy—worse than—no daddy—good boy— " he spoke slowly, with long pauses between the words, as though he might have been arguing the matter with his conscience—"never harmed nothin' in the worl',—beset by evil all the days of his life— ; I dunno —ef I done right or no—, but God A'mighty furgive me ef the lie ware wrong."

And the old storekeeper dropped down upon an upturned keg, and burying his face in his hands sobbed as unreservedly and as bitterly as ever the little ill-treated stripling, for whom the lie had been spoken—asleep at that moment in his cabin on the bluff—had wept for the hardships of fate.

To him all the props of his character seemed crumbling about him, a pitiful wreck. Truth had been its foundation stone, and the staunch old builder had accepted of himself no compromise for meaner material.

Thus is truth the foundation of all genuine self-respect.

CHAPTER VII

THE BEST OF FRIENDS MUST PART

It was over; the officers had passed by in the fog, unseen and unseeing. So close had they been to the little cart and its frightened driver that they might almost have heard the beating of the boy's heart had they stopped long enough to listen.

But they had not stopped, and the friendly mists had veiled both Joe and the tell-tale load of apples until the danger had passed by. When the last sound of horses' hoofs had died away in the distance Joe crept out from his hiding place and began rapidly unloading the fruit, by dumping it into a huge trough from which the hogs were fed. As long as he could remember he had been drilled for this very occasion; the coming of the revenue officers. Yet, at the real moment of danger he never once thought of his

drilling; his own good sense told him precisely what to do.

"They might come back," he whispered, patting as he did so the old mule's back. He had long had a habit of talking to the mule; they two had been so often together upon that solitary journey down the secret trail to the hidden distillery that he had come to look upon the old beast as something almost human; almost a friend indeed.

"They might come back, and we-uns don't want 'em to come up on this here load, now, do we Kitty?"

The hand upon the mule's back trembled in spite of the empty cart. In all his life Joe could not remember to have heard a horse's hoof along that obscure little trail, other than old Kit's. That noisy, bold clatter that had just passed by in the gray fog's arms was ample assurance that the path was no longer a secret one.

He led the old mule into the barn and pulled down an armful of hay.

"You did behave a lady, that's what you

did," he whispered in his old friend's ear. "One word from you-uns an' we wouldn't be here now, would we, Kitty?"

He tossed a half-dozen ears of corn into the trough and then went out noiselessly, glancing cautiously about him, lest the foe might still be lurking near. But all was silent save the sound of the old mule munching the dry corn. Carefully fastening the latch he picked his way quickly to the cabin door, and lifting the latch entered.

Granny had risen and was sitting over the fireplace blowing upon the red embers. Joe knelt at her side and mechanically relieved her of her task. But before the red blaze had begun to send its little forked tongues in and out the cedar splinters he had told the story of the raid.

The old woman listened, trembling and frightened, offering no interruption, save an occasional "I knowed it;" "It was bound to come;" or else, "I always said it would be so."

All the morning they sat there in the cabin,

afraid to stir, waiting, hoping, dreading the news that must come. At last granny turned to Joe and said:

"Hadn't you-uns better slip down to the bluff an' see what's happened, son?"

"No, granny," said Joe. "I don't do any more 'slippin'' round. I'm done with that. If I go to that thar still I'll go open an' aboveboard, same's anybody else. But I'd ruther die as to go thar. I hope you won't ask me; oh, I hope you won't ask me, granny!"

She would not ask him again, and so the day wore on to noon, and still no tidings came of the midnight raid. She would have gone herself had she known positively that Bentley had been taken. All her life since the beginning of the illicit establishment she had had before her a picture of him lying dead and still under a jungle of mountain laurel. Yet now, although she dreaded the worst, she could not bring herself to believe that he was really dead or had been taken prisoner. And on this account she dared not go to look for him. Bentley was not

one to be taken unawares; it was more than probable that he was merely in hiding somewhere, she thought, until the danger should have passed by. In this event she knew that his anger would be almost unbearable should she, by going to seek him, bring upon him some new danger. So she sat there with Joe in the lonely cabin, hoping, fearing—dreading always and listening for the well-known step upon the walk.

It had indeed, as Joe said, been "hard licks" for both the old woman and her grandson. There had not been a day when either of them would not have rejoiced to know the dull, dark days were over. Blows for the boy, grumblings and growlings for the mother; that was what their life had been since the still was put in operation. Yet neither of them had thought or hoped for such an ending as they now feared had come, though, to be sure, they had learned to know long since that it might come at any moment. The old mother, perhaps more than the boy, had dreaded and expected it, yet it

held its surprise and its sorrow for her, for although Bentley was rough and ungracious to an extent that was almost cruel at times, still he was the husband of her child, her daughter, and nature was not dead in her. Then she fancied he would be home by and by, wanting his dinner and desperately angry should anything indeed have happened at the still.

But the noon passed, and the shadows began to creep across the little yard and lay upon the doorstep. Surely with the darkness he would come, else Bill or Jerry, or some of the others would bring tidings. They could not have all been killed.

Joe shared her anxiety to the full. Only once there had come to him a thought that the little tool-chest would no longer have to be hurried under the bed at the sound of a well-known footstep crunching the gravel outside the door. But he quickly put the thought aside as something wicked at this time of doubt and of danger. Once, too, he remembered his wish, and the answer that had come like a thunderbolt

straight from the sky. It frightened him; it was as though the intensity of his desire had made itself into a prayer which God had thrown back at him granted, but with such fearful results that the granting seemed a curse—that terrible wish that it might be the last time he should ever take the trip over the secret trail to the still under the bluff. Thinking of the wish reminded him of Kit; she had had nothing to eat since early morning. He got up and went out to the barn; the old mule came to meet him, rubbing her nose against his arm. With sudden impulse he threw his arms around the animal's neck and burst into tears.

His tears relieved him; the long strain of suspense had told upon him; but the old mule, his companion in loneliness, had awakened within him that spirit of courage natural to boyhood.

He returned to the cabin and insisted upon helping granny to get supper. After a simple meal of broiled bacon and hoecake, a potato roasted upon the hearth among the ashes, and a

cup of steaming coffee, the two sat themselves down again to—wait.

This time they had not long to wait. The moonlight lay upon the gravel outside, white and ghostly, drawing with startling distinctness the figure of a man, tall and gaunt, skulking across the yard to the cabin door. Without knocking, a hand was lifted to the latch, the string carefully drawn and the frightened face of Jake Underwood appeared in the doorway. Lifting a finger for silence he entered cautiously and drew the door fast behind him, pulling the latch-string to the inside, where it dangled lazily beneath the wooden fastening Joe had made for it.

"I ware afeard some o' them revenuers might be about," Underwood remarked by way of apology.

Granny silently pointed to a chair; she was too frightened to speak, though she motioned the man to go on, knowing that he had come with news of the raid.

"Mis' Bentley," said the law-breaker, "we-uns have had some mighty bad luck over to the

still. Me an' Bill had heard some talkin' an' we come over here last night to warn Lige. But we ware most too late." He paused, hesitated, then broke out fiercely: "I've got awful news for you, Mis' Bentley, awful. I'd rather cut my tongue out as to tell you, but it's got to come. After me an' Lige an' Bill left here last night we went to the still to hide the liquor against the revenuers an' to slip out o' sight ourselves if thar should be any danger.

"When we got thar everything looked that safe an' secure we misdoubted thar ware any revenuers around. An' so, tempted by the warmth an' the keg o' brandy we kept circulatin', we decided to stay thar an' take our chances. It ware not half hour until we heard 'em at the very mouth o' the still. We ware that set back we couldn't move for a minute, an' the next minute ware too late. They ware fairly upon us, though we made a scramble for the woods as best we could. One o' the boys left his coat in the officers' hands, an' Lige carried a bullet in his back that disabled him before

we could get to safe cover. We got down in a sort of a brake, though, amongst the laurel, an' hid thar while the revenuers broke up the still. We ware that close we could hear the licks as they knocked things to pieces. When things got toler'ble quiet I drug Lige back whar the growth ware thicker, an' we-uns lay thar waitin' for daylight. About daybreak I could still hear the men scoutin' about lookin' for us. Lige ware ravin' by this time, plumb out'n his head. About twelve o'clock to-day he died."

His voice sank to a whisper, carrying with it the horror of that which he had seen and heard in the brush. The old woman was crying softly, but Joe was too frightened and bewildered for tears. The tragedy of the law-breaker had come home to him in all its sudden, startling horror. After a moment's silence the moonshiner went on with his story:

"The boys got away somehows, but Lige ware dead. I come up here to tell you-uns, so's Joe could go over thar an' haul him home."

But Joe sprang to his feet with a startled protest: "Oh, I can't," said he; "I can't go back to that place! I'm afeard o' him—the dead; an' I'm afeard o' the livin'. The revenuers'll be hid in the brake an' I'm afeard they'd shoot me, or else fetch me away to prison. Don't send me. Granny, they'd know I'd been haulin' the apples; they'd be sure to harm me in some way."

"Now, that's a true word," said the visitor. "I never thought o' that. But I don't see who else can go. I can't; they know I belong to the gang; I crawled half way here on my hands an' knees. It ought to be some one that ain't got any call to be afeard." He was silent a moment, thinking, then said with sudden inspiration:

"Jube Jarvis would go. Jube ain't got any call to be afeard o' anybody."

"No," said granny, "Jube's got a good name. Nothin' can't touch him. I reckin Jube would go an' fetch that misguided one home to a decent buryin'."

"I can go over an' ask Jube that word," said Joe, ready to do his part so long as it did not take him back to the despised still. As he sped away in the moonlight in search of the man who had no call to be afraid of anybody, Joe felt, for the first time in his life, the force of a good name. Unconsciously he began to compare the two men—the dead man lying in the brake with no one to carry his body home, and the man who had nothing to fear in going where the guilty and suspected were afraid to venture. Unconsciously, there on the lonely mountain road, death behind and danger before him, the boy made the great turn in his life that was to affect all his after destiny. Scarcely realizing that he was speaking, as, lifting his tear-washed face to the solemn skies, he recorded a vow: "I mean," said he, "to make a good name. A good name air worth all gains. A man who has got it need be afeard o' nothin', nothin'."

He felt the force of it still more when he had delivered his message and saw Jube Jarvis,

without a moment's hesitation, begin to make his preparations for bringing home the body hidden in the laurel brake. The first thing he did was to send for some of the neighbors and request their assistance.

"Tell 'em to fetch lanterns, son," said he to the messenger, "an' all the help they can get."

Lanterns! there was no skulking about this man. He was no more afraid to go into this den of corruption, spied upon though it was by the eye of the law, than he was to go behind his own counter. To Joe it was courage perfected.

"Mr. Jarvis, ain't you afeard to fetch lanterns down thar? The revenuers may be hid about."

"No, Joe," said the storekeeper; "I don't do nothin' in the dark. As fur the revenuers, I'd rather they know who it be; then maybe they won't be shootin' harum-scarum. I ain't afeard o' the light, ever."

Inspired by the man's courage Joe renewed his vow to make a good name.

"It's better than a shot-gun," he told himself, as he slipped off home again, having seen

the men, a full procession and fully lighted, start on their way to the deserted cave and the laurel brake near by. Later came the simple funeral, the burial, and then the place settled down into such a quiet as it had never known. What days they were to Joe; no more fear of the heavy step on the walk, the threats, the drive in the dawn, the fire under the crags and the dangers that lurk in the bush. Only the long days with granny; the simple duties about the place, such as feeding old Kit, keeping the wood cut and the kitchen fire made; and at night the tool-chest, and the curious things that grew unchallenged beneath his eager hand. Happy days, blessed nights; season of singing birds, odorous woods and quiet dreams. And then came the awakening; came the season of falling leaves, scarlet and gay gold, drifting down to the hollows with the chestnuts and the frost-sweetened chinquapins. The Indian pipes were in bloom, the golden-rod flaunted a flag in every fence corner. To Joe the mountain had never been so beautiful; he had never loved it

before. Hitherto the purple pines had held something of terror in their melancholy soughing; but now he recognized it as the music that had lulled his infancy to slumber. And thus, while all nature warmed and throbbed within him, came the change; it must all be given up. They were going away. His father's brother had come over from the first bench of the mountains and persuaded his grandmother that she and Joe could not live there alone. He kept a "stage stand," a kind of rude inn where travelers across the mountain sometimes stopped for refreshment. She and Joe were welcome to a home there, he said; and "Joe could help a little about the place." The price the cabin and land would bring "would be used to make the old grandmother comfortable in her old age." So, after much persuasion, granny consented. Jube Jarvis bought the cabin and Ben Bentley dropped the money into his pockets "for granny's comfort in her old age."

Joe was bitterly opposed to going, but his uncle had carried the day.

The boy had a strong premonition of sorrow ahead, born perhaps of the hardships that lay behind him. At the last, however, he accepted the inevitable and tried to persuade himself that all was for the best.

"It ain't been so powerful sunshiny up here," he told himself as he stood upon the bluff's edge taking a last look at the far-away hills across the valley. "It's been hard licks—nothin' but hard licks all along. It can't be much worser down thar on the first bench o' Cumberland Mountain than it's been up here on top, I reckin."

His eyes filled with tears, however, when later in the day he watched the loading of the wagon containing their modest household goods. Two strange horses stood in old Kit's stall, while old Kit herself, tied to a sapling, waited for her new owner to come and claim her; for faithful old Kit had been sold, along with the house, to Jube Jarvis. It was this, perhaps more than anything else, that had fostered in the boy's heart a distrust of his uncle. He had begged so hard

to take Kit, promising to feed and care for her with his own hands; but Bentley had insisted that the money would be worth more to granny than a worn-out old mule in the corncrib. It was this determination to turn all their little property into money that had aroused Joe's suspicions. There was but one comfort about the sale of Kit; Jube Jarvis had bought her. Yet when Joe heard the new owner's voice in the house he crept away, so that he might not know when she was led off.

"Seems like she's been the only friend I ever had," he said, as he waited behind the house until Mr. Jarvis should be gone.

Once, however, he peeped around the corner just at the moment when old Kit lifted her head to look that way. Instantly a familiar bray fell upon his ear; Jube Jarvis was leading poor Kit away. Joe was seized by a sudden impulse.

"Mr. Jarvis!" he shouted. "Oh, Mr. Jarvis! Wait a minute!"

The new owner of the mule jerked the rope

knotted about the animal's neck, and waited until the former owner could catch up with him.

A moment more and without a word he had thrown his arms around the neck of his late friend in adversity and burst into tears.

The old mule tried to rub his sleeve with her nose, as though she would have returned the caress.

"Come, come now," said the storekeeper, "what ails ye, Joe, ter be allowin' as I'd mistreat one o' God A'mighty's critters? I'll be as keerful o' old Kit as Joe Bentley ever ware, an' that's promise enough."

Joe drew his rough sleeve across his eyes.

"I know it, Mr. Jarvis," said he. "I know you-uns'll treat her well. You-uns air fair an' kin' ter all, man an' beast, an' I'm proper glad she fell inter your hands so long as she had ter go. But her an' me have seen some tolerble hard times tergether, Mr. Jarvis; an' somehows I can't think of her as only an ole mule critter; it seems like I ware partin' from a friend. Fur

you see—we ware—sorter—partners like—an'—an'—I loved her." And again poor Joe dropped his head upon Kit's back and sobbed.

The storekeeper had not forgotten the many errands Joe had run for him those days at the store; moreover, his own heart was filled with forebodings for the boy's future.

"No mammy an' lots worse than no daddy always," he told himself as he took Joe's arm and led him away, beyond reach of listening ears. Perhaps they were never to meet again, and he had a parting word to whisper in the ear that had ever been open to counsel.

"Now, son," said he, "I want to give you a word to carry along with you; a short word maybe, but one as will go a long ways if you-uns will take heed to it. But first I want to say, howsomever, that I bought this yere critter bekase it ware you-uns', an' I knowed as you-uns set store by it. I've had many a favior at you-uns' hands, Joe."

"At mine, Mr. Jarvis?"

"Yes, sir; at you-uns'. Sech faviors, to be

"SEEMS LIKE I WARE PARTIN' FROM A FRIEND"
(Page 159)

sure, as only a boy can render, but not sech as all boys air ready to render. So I have set 'em down to you-uns' credit. An' I'm takin' this here dumb critter to save you the sorrow of seein' it go to strangers, and maybe a-worritin' bekase it air likely to be mistreated. Now, I hope you-uns'll find as kind a master as ole Kit's comin' to, that's all. I ain't denyin' as I mistrusts that thar uncle o' yours that have turned up jest in time to take control o' your granny's truck an' other belongin's. But, Joey, I want you-uns to reckerlect this word: it ain't always favor'ble surroundin's as makes a man of a boy. A good seed will grow in mighty bad ground sometimes with keerful tendin'. Now, you take the advice of a ole man as found you friendly an' wishes you well. In tryin' to git the good things o' this world, first of all be sure an' get for yourse'f a good name. Get it an' keep it. In the long run o' time it will stand you far more than all the gold an' silver o' this world. Remember that; if so be you air pore an' humble, let your motto be 'fair an' square.'

You'll find she'll fetch you out all safe at the end."

The words were spoken with an earnestness that made them doubly impressive. Joe felt that the storekeeper shared his own vague doubts as to the future awaiting him and his grandmother.

"I'll try to live up to your words, Mr. Jarvis," said he; "I'll surely try." And without further words the two clasped hands in a long good-bye. The merchant little suspected how his parting advice was to shape Joe's future.

When they had parted Joe suddenly turned and said:

"If I ever git able and come back for her you'll sell old Kit to me, Mr. Jarvis, won't you?"

"Without any int'rest," said the storekeeper; "an' thar's my hand on it."

There was another long, silent clasp, a fervent "God bless you" from the storekeeper, and they turned their separate ways.

Joe walked slowly back through the reddening sumach with his head bent forward upon

his breast. The storekeeper's blessing lingered in his ears. Would it follow him indeed upon that strange, eventful path into which his young feet were but just turning? Alas, he would have need of all blessings that might come his way. He realized it before the sumach came again.

CHAPTER VIII

SYLVIA

The old stage road across the mountain had been forsaken long ago. When the railroad daringly cut its way through and under the great barrier-mountain it practically cut off travel through the old ways. The old "stage stands" are falling to decay; the old road itself has gone to wreck and ruin long ago. Land slides have hurled mighty bowlders across the way, and the merciless mountain torrents have cut trenches, deep and dangerous, through the very heart of it. There is little left to tell of the once famous popularity of the old stage road—only tumble-down rows of buildings still marking the sites of former inns, and hewn logs, in rotting heaps, where a great barn used to shelter the stage horses.

Only here and there, where the railroad

passed near without touching, may be found an old lodging house. To be sure, travel did not abandon the old road in a night; it was years and years before the mountaineer brought himself to believe the "cyars" were safe. And some of the old aristocrats, too, were slow to abandon the old way. The big "stand on the first bench" held its own right along with the iron-horse of progress until after the war had ended; and even to-day a traveler may find accommodation at the old Rock House that is still sometimes called a "stage stand."

It was here that Tom Tate used to find fresh horses in the great barn while his passengers were finding refreshment at Ben Bentley's inn. Tom always managed to find excuse for stopping at Bentley's; a trace was "givin' way," or a wheel needed "tendin'," a horse had "cast a shoe," anything almost, was sufficient to hold up the rumbling old stage at Bentley's inn. Generally Tom managed to stop over night, but that was when he did not find his passengers too much for him, as was sometimes the

case, when they boldly demanded that he proceed at once to the town farther down the mountain.

Always on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays the stage would draw up at the inn door, and a moment later, emptied of its load, would disappear under the wings of the big barn. And then Tom would disappear in the direction of a little cabin hidden away among the cedars, where his "baby girl," Sylvia, would be waiting at the window for him. The moment the first note of the stage horn could be heard floating down the mountain Sylvia would be at the window, watching, waiting for Tom.

Tom Tate was a rough fellow outside, a big, burly fellow, with sharp, black eyes and a shaggy beard and hair. But there must have been something very soft and tender under the rough exterior to make the little pinched face pressed against the window pane brighten with happiness when the familiar music of the stage horn sounded among the great Cumberland crags. And this same little face, to be sure,

was the cause of all big Tom's sly manœuvring to hold up the stage over night at Bentley's.

It was a very weary face that lay against the pillow one afternoon in December waiting for Tom's horn to blow. Four times had Tom's little crippled daughter dragged a twisted foot to the window to see if there might be any sign of the stage coach coming down the mountain.

At a certain point, far up the mountain, the stage could be seen for one brief moment making the bend that would bring it down upon the next bench, one of those odd, level stretches peculiar to the Cumberland range.

Always before sweeping into this "open" Tom Tate blew a long, mellow call, a signal to the little girl in the cabin, who immediately took up her stand at the window to watch the great coach swing around the curve.

It was a wistful face, old and young at the same time. This may have been because of the foot which the rheumatism had dwarfed and twisted. It was a very tiny body, too, for her years. For although big Tom called her

his "baby girl," Sylvia had passed her twelfth year. On the December afternoon that she waited for the stage the snow was falling in long, shimmery sheets slantwise, making a sort of silver veil that rendered it rather doubtful if the stage would be visible, after all. Sylvia turned from the window with an impatient sigh, and limped back to the couch in the chimney corner. "It is so snowy I can't see the road," said she in the fretful tone of the invalid. "The mountains are like gray ghosts, an' the trees all big blots in the gray storm. I sha'n't see father come round the bench after all."

An old woman, Sylvia's aunt, sat in the opposite corner, knitting; she laid the stocking across her knees and began to rope off the strands of yellow yarn, saying as she did so:

"Now, now! I wouldn't fret. It'll come down just as well may be, the stage will; an' then'll come Tom, an' then supper. I've got a nice, tasty squirrel for you-uns' supper, too. That little boy over to Bentley's fetched it for you-uns."

The child's face brightened as she lifted herself on her elbow.

"Joe! Did Joe fetch it, Aunt Jane? Did Joe fetch me a squirrel?"

"I reckin that ware his name. It ware that boy that come last fall with his gran'ma to help about the place. An' they do say the way old Bentley works him is a cryin' shame. But he fetched you-uns a mighty nice, young squirrel for your supper. He said p'inted it ware for you-uns. 'For Silvy' ware what he said."

The small face beamed.

"Well, I reckon that means me," said she, laughing merrily. "Silvy spells me, for true. He said he aimed to make me a crutch; an' some day, he says, he'll make me a cheer with a little rollin' wheel, so I can just shove myself along. He made a crutch for an ole woman down in the cove as hadn't walked a step in twenty years, an' she's just gettin' about on that crutch as peart as anybody. I hope Joe'll make mine. I'd hate to have to lie here twenty years. Seems like I'd rather be dead as to lie here all that

time. Oh, I do hope Joe'll make my crutch! I think I'd be able to get about on that. Oh, I do hope he will!"

There were tears in the eyes turned to the window where the snowflakes were darkening the landscape. The voice was a pitiful little wail.

"He'll make it," said the old woman. "I most know he will. They say he's real peart with his tools. I most know he'll make it, an' then you'll be gettin' well before your pappy can make all that money to fetch you to Fluridy with."

"I ain't lookin' fur that." The voice had a despairing tone now. "I ain't lookin' fur no fortunes to come droppin' down the chimney to fetch a pore lame gal to Fluridy. If my walkin' depends on that, I'll be shut up here twenty years an' more, I'm thinkin'. What I looks for is that thar crutch Joe Bentley promised to make for me, if his mean ole uncle can be persuaded to let him take time enough to make it. I hate meanness."

"Why, Silvy!" exclaimed the aunt, "that's mighty bad manners."

"I hate manners, too," said Sylvia. "I hate anything that makes ole Bentley anything but mean. He is mean; he's meaner'n p'ison. I know he makes Joe work all day, an' then don't always give him a bed to sleep on nights. There! that's meaner than a dog!"

"Well, then, let it be," said the old woman. "I have heard as how he got all the ole woman's money, an' then threated to have 'em both druv off the place if she said a word about Joe's workin'. 'Pears like the old lady air tolerble fond o' the boy."

"He's a good boy," said Sylvia. She had forgotten the stage in her defense of Joe. "He's a good boy; he's goin' to make me a crutch. I'm hopin' more from that than I am from father's 'fortune' that's to fetch me to Fluridy. There! that's what I think of Joe Bentley!"

"Hush! What was that?"

She lifted herself to listen; the very last

note of a horn, mellow and sweet and clear as a silver bell, floated down the mountain.

The girl attempted to spring up, but fell back with a low moan upon her pillows. She had forgotten the bad foot.

"I can't get up," she sobbed. "Help me, Aunt Jane. Help me up to the window to see father's stage come down the mountain."

The old woman slipped her arm under Sylvia's shoulder and attempted to lift her up, but when she tried to balance herself upon the crippled foot the pain was so great that she could only fall back upon her pillows and sob.

"Ye must a-strained it some a-tryin' to jump up," said Aunt Jane.

"An' now I can't see father come down," sobbed the sick girl. "Oh, why don't Joe bring my crutch!"

The stage had turned into the last bend before Sylvia reached the window, too late to see the rocking old top disappear among the intervening trees. She was still standing at the window, the tears upon her cheeks, when

there came a hurried knocking at the door. To the old woman's "Come in," the latch was instantly lifted and Joe appeared in the doorway. Joe, with such a pale, pinched little face that old Kit would never have recognized in him the beloved master she had carried off in the gray dawn to the still under the waterfall. The eyes were sunken and weak; the shoulders had a telltale droop, bewailing, without voice, the unnatural burdens laid upon them.

Broken, disappointed, weary unto death, but still the same honest, uncompromising Joe. He carried in his hand a little wooden crutch, carefully wadded with part of an old comfort where the frail arm must rest upon the saddle.

He walked straight up to the window where Sylvia had climbed upon a tall chair to watch for the stage.

"I have fetched your crutch, Silvy," said he. "Measure an' see if it's the proper length so I can trim it off some if it's too long. Measure right quick, please," he said, seeing the girl was about to break into raptures. "I have slipped

off, an' I must run right back. Here, just run yer arm over that, an' take this handle in your hand. There! now let's see you go!"

The laugh that accompanied the words seemed almost out of place upon the thin lips that had known, alas! too little of boyish mirth. He tarried but a moment to see her try his gift; her delight was quite thanks enough and he waited for no other, though he heard her laugh and the words that she called after him.

"Oh, Joe! I reckon this air the nearest I'll come to Fluridy, and I thank you-uns lots."

He had heard about the Florida plan, and, like Sylvia, he never expected it to come any nearer consummation than it had already come. They had laughed together over the fortune Tom Tate was promising them should come "down the chimney some o' these days, an' whisk 'em all away to Fluridy, where the rheumatiz would be thawed out o' the 'flicted body."

The one pleasure Joe had stumbled upon in his new life was Tom Tate's little lame girl. He had spent many hours when work was over at

his uncle's inn talking to Sylvia about the wonderful things he expected to make with his tools as soon as he had the leisure to "work on 'em." And he had found her a ready listener and an earnest sympathizer. Once she had said with a little sigh :

"Now, if only I could divide up all this useless time o' mine with you."

From that moment he had been busy devising means whereby the time should no longer be "useless," or hang heavily upon the cripple. The crutch was the first step. That would help her to "get about," and truly feel that she was not helpless ; the first great step, indeed, on the road to independence. The night that he tacked on the padding, when everybody was asleep—for Sylvia's crutch had been made nights when work was over—was a very happy one to Joe. But when he dropped in with it, and saw the glad light spring to the tired eyes he felt more than repaid for all his lost sleep and labor. Sylvia had lost her mother when a baby, but, like most of the mountain people, Tom had not

been at any loss to find a convenient relative to come and keep house for him. Indeed, he had been most fortunate in this respect, for his sister was scarcely less devoted to Sylvia than Tom himself.

She, too, saw the pleasure, the flush of hope that Joe's present had called forth, and she followed the boy to the gate and tendered her thanks in her own way.

"It air the first time I have seen her pleasured this many a day," said she, "an' you ware mighty good to remember a little 'flicted gal that way."

"It pleasured me to make it for her," said Joe; "it ware a real pleasure to me, Mis' Tate."

"You air a good boy," said Miss Tate; "all the mountain says that word o' you. They all say it air a shame the way you air used down yonder. They all gives you a fair word; a mighty good name."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Joe. "I'd rather have a good name as to have fair treatment."

And as he trudged home through the snow

he remembered Jube Jarvis's parting advice and felt glad that his efforts to follow his first friend's advice had not been wholly vain. He remembered Sylvia's words concerning the trip to Florida; he thought of them as he drew near the old Rock House, that was now his only home, and saw the old stage drawn up before the door, and Tom Tate helping two passengers to alight. He remembered the promised trip to Florida. Like Sylvia he had little faith in the coming of the great fortune; yet afterward, when it did come, he remembered the promise with sorrow.

CHAPTER IX

THE BELATED OLD STAGE COACH

At the Rock House, Bentley was fuming and fussing over the belated stage coach; it was already several hours late and still no sign of it.

"The dinner's plumb sp'iled long ago," said he to his wife as he was returning from one of his repeated walks to the gate to see if the rumbling old vehicle might not "be in sight."

"Land alive man," said she, "what ails you, to take on so? Seems like you ought to know that a stage belated in a snow-storm means a full bed for the Rock House."

"An' whar can we put so many, I'd like to know," said Bentley; "thar ain't but three rooms in this house have got fireplaces fitten to light a blaze in; an' one o' them has to be give to granny."

The woman glanced at Joe.

"We-uns air pore," said she, "an' trav'lers don't come along ev'ry day. We'll be obleeged to crowd up some. Joe'll have to turn out for granny, an' somebody can have her room to-night; thar's a good fireplace in thar."

Joe said nothing; he had long ago learned the uselessness of trying to "stand up for granny." He stood silently in the doorway watching the snow drifting in great blinding sheets across the road, driven by the December wind under the long, low ledges of the mountain. He thought of the swaying old stage making that dangerous descent in the teeth of the storm. Tom Tate was a careful driver, and had doubtless waited somewhere along the road during the heavier flurries. The way was steep and slippery at all times; but in winter, and since the railroad had reduced travel, it was far more so.

Joe felt uneasy enough as hour after hour passed and still the stage did not come. Finally, when Bentley, growing too impatient to wait at home, went up the mountain to meet it, Joe slipped into granny's little room, that had been

a big pantry in the palmy days of the Rock House, before the railroad killed travel on the road, and drawing from under the bed, where he had hidden the little carefully-smoothed crutch he had finished the night before, watched for a chance when Mrs. Bentley was not on guard and slipped away through the woods to Tom's cabin beyond the orchard.

He heard the long, winding melody of the horn before he had made half the trip back, and fearing the anger of his uncle should he find him absent, he set out in a run for the house.

When he reached it the stage had turned from the door, and Tom was driving the tired horses into the great spreading old barn, where they must assuredly have felt lonely enough but for the cows and chickens that had been given habitation there since the need for so much room had become a thing of the past.

Joe stole around to the back way and came up just in time to take the valises that the two passengers had deposited at the door. He saw them, a very tall man and a very short one, go up

to the dirty old register and leave their names there—Silas Thompson, attorney, Knoxville, and Emerson H. L. White, Knoxville. The small man was a great lumber dealer and manufacturer, and Mr. Thompson was his lawyer. Joe deposited their valises as he had orders to do, one in the room generally occupied by granny, the other in what was called "the sitting-room." For much of the inn had been torn away of late years, and much of it was still too bare and exposed for winter habitation.

When the boy returned to the sitting-room he saw the manufacturer stooping, and with chilled fingers trying to unfasten the refractory latch of an arctic overshoe. Instantly Joe dropped upon one knee, and giving a nimble twist and jerk soon had the shoe off; in a twinkling the mate followed and the boy rose.

"Thank you, my boy," said the gentleman. "My fingers were so nearly frozen I couldn't undo the latch. Now do you run your hand in the pocket of that overcoat of mine and get

out that big orange. They don't come into these parts every day, I am thinking."

"No, sir," said Joe, "an' thankee, sir. I'll fetch it to granny."

"Wait, then," said the lawyer, "and feel in my other pocket for the mate to it for yourself."

Again Joe expressed his thanks and ran off to granny. A moment more and he was on the way to the great barn where Tom was busy with his horses. He wished to catch the stage driver before he left, and send one of the oranges to Sylvia. Indeed, had he had a dozen oranges he would in all probability have found some one to give them to. For unselfishness is born in the heart of a boy as conscience is born in his soul; a gift straight from God that may be cultivated or destroyed, just as the possessor wills.

Joe called lustily at the door of the barn, but there was no answer. This was odd, seeing the doors were wide open and the racks empty. Entering, Joe was still more surprised to find Tom was there, shaking the snow from his old brown beaver and making haste to be off.

"You had a hard drive, didn't you Tom?" said Joe, ignoring the man's silence.

"Mighty hard," was the reply in a sullen tone, so unlike the usually friendly Tom. "I druv under a bluff and thar I had to wait a whole hour before it held up enough for me to make that thar last bend o' the mount'n. And all the time I knowed Silvy ware frettin' and worritin' at home."

"Let me feed the horses, Tom," said Joe, "and you go on home. Put this in here—"

He ran his hand, with the orange in it, into Tom's great gaping pocket, and the next moment almost cried out with astonishment as Tom's big bridle hand sent him headlong across the barn floor. Had the man gone mad! For a moment Joe thought so, and this fear served to curb his anger.

"I ware only puttin' that orange in thar for Silvy," said he. "One o' them new men give it to me, and I wanted Silvy to have it, that ware all."

Tom began to apologize with haste. "I didn't

mean to hurt you," said he. "You know I wouldn't 'a' done that. I ware jest—I ware only —dad burn my hide, I don't know what I ware doin'. 'Pears like this here drivin' in snow-storms and worritin' about my little gal have in and about took what little sense I ever did have. I ax your pardon, Joe. You-uns have always been mighty kind to my Silvy; I ain't furgot the night you rid five miles in the rain to fetch the yerb doctor whenst she was sick and I off on a trip. I wouldn't hurt you—not for all Cum'lun Mount'n."

"I know that," said Joe. "And I know how you feel. Now you go on home. I'll feed the horses and lock the doors. And you tell Silvy I sent her the orange for her supper. Oh, Tom! I fetched her the crutch this evenin', and she ware that delighted it done me good to see her."

"I'll be bound she ware," said Tom, with both a smile and a sigh. "Poor little gal; she air that sprightly and ambitious, and to be so hindered! It air plumb distractin'. But it ain't goin' to be forever. Not by a long sight.

I'm hopin' to fetch her to Fluridy mighty soon now."

Was it fancy? Was the face, lifted for a moment to the uncertain light, changed? Where was the honest brown face of Tom Tate, the mountain stage driver? The face which only the day before had beamed from the box, earnest, eager, open to all the world, and honest in the good light of day?

Joe tried to shake off the feeling that had taken possession of him—the feeling that Tom had changed.

"Tell Silvy," said he, "that the orange come from Fluridy anyhows. I know just what she'll say, Tom. She'll say: 'That's as near Fluridy as I'll ever get.' That's what Silvy'll say."

"An' it'll be a blamed big mistake," snarled Tom, and again that odd, unnatural look came into the brown face. But before Joe could speak Tom was gone. He went dashing out the door with something that sounded very like an oath, but was too low for Joe to understand just what it was.

He forgot the incident, however, while seated by the sitting-room fire after supper listening to the strange gentlemen talking. One of them, Mr. White, was taking his attorney over into a great lumber district across the mountain to settle up the last year's contracts and to make new ones for the coming year. The great manufacturer told of the wonderful shops in Knoxville, of the numerous hands employed there, and of the curious things, in the way of furniture, that were every day turned out there. Joe listened with a delight that was not lost upon the stranger. Indeed, the rich man, devoted as he was to his manufactures, was almost as sorry as Joe when, with a sigh, the boy gathered the travelers' boots and went off into the kitchen to black them. And then it was he remembered Tom's odd behavior.

He was not himself, that was plain enough.

"Why didn't he answer when I called?" said Joe to himself. "Why, he hung his head like—like—" the word was whispered softly, "like a thief."

The house was still when he carried the shoes to the gentlemen's rooms. In the sitting-room, where Mr. White had been put to sleep, the fire still burned low in the black fireplace. It would be warm there all night; in the rafter room, where he would lodge, Joe knew how the bleak winds would creep underneath the loose clapboards. A temptation assailed him; why not lie down there before the fire and sleep? He would be up and out long enough before anybody else was awake. The men were going by private conveyance the rest of their journey, and so would not have to be up in time for the stage. Moreover, the stage itself would, like as not, be snowbound for several days. There would be no early rising at the Rock House; it would be quite safe, he fancied, as he stretched himself out before the warm fire, and soon fell asleep.

When the sound of his breathing told that he was sleeping, the manufacturer, over in the bed, lifted himself upon an elbow and glanced in sympathetic silence at the weary, overbur-

dened sleeper. Then, slipping softly across the room, he took his own heavy greatcoat and laid it over the sleeping boy. In his youth he, too, had known what it was to wrestle with an adverse fate; the recollection of his own struggles had made a very tender spot in his heart for struggling boyhood everywhere.

With the first peep of the gray dawn over the mountain, Joe awoke. When he saw the handsome coat lying there on the floor beside him his heart seemed to give a great bound and then to stop beating. How came it there? Had he been cold in the night and taken the coat in his sleep? Surely he had never dared to touch it when awake and in his senses. He carefully brushed and replaced the garment where it had hung the night before, and, softly opening the door, slipped away to his morning duties.

When he returned to the house there was great commotion in the sitting-room. Mr. White, was walking the floor in an excited, troubled way, while the attorney stood before the fire, his hands crossed behind him, a worried and

uneasy expression upon his face. Bentley was swearing like a madman. Poor Joe heard his own name mixed and mingled rather freely with the oaths; and granny, poor, feeble old granny, was standing in the doorway waiting for him, the tears rolling down her wrinkled cheeks, and looking as though her heart had broken. When Joe appeared she tottered forward and held out her hands helplessly, pleadingly to him.

"Oh, Joey, son," said she, "come in here an' tell 'em you didn't steal the gentleman's money. Tell 'em, son, you didn't touch the coat." And with a low, broken cry of despair granny fell forward, senseless, upon the floor.

CHAPTER X

UNDER THE DOORSTEP

It was quite dark when Tom Tate reached his cabin, after leaving the care of the horses to Joe's ever-willing hands. He walked slowly, and, although he had been in such haste to get away from the barn, he took a roundabout path home, and one that carried him more than a mile out of his way. His step, usually so quick and expectant, was slow and heavy, and he lingered outside the door, under cover of the sheltering darkness.

Sylvia had been industriously practicing with her crutch; already she was able to walk about the room with its assistance, and more than once the glad laugh of childhood, so seldom heard in the cabin of late, had brought an answering smile to the lips of Miss Tate, busily preparing supper in the shed-room.

"By to-morrow," said Sylvia, "I'll be able to go over to the Rock House. By to-morrow. I'll sure go over an' see Joe, Aunt Jane, if the snow ain't too deep for my old pardner here."

"Why, honey," said Miss Tate, "you ain't been out o' the house for nigh on six months. It would in an' about kill you to go out in the weather. You mustn't think about it, Silvy; not before spring, no ways."

"Well," laughed Sylvia, "I am thinkin' right smart about it. More than I have thought in many a day, I reckon." And she whisked off to the window to see if Tom might be coming home.

He was very, very late. Later than she had ever known him; another time she would have fretted and complained at the delay. But this evening she had been so occupied with Joe's gift that she had forgotten how time was flying.

Suddenly the ear, tuned by affliction to catch the faintest footfall, caught the sound of ap-

proaching steps. She listened a moment, a puzzled expression in the blue eyes turned to the window. It was certainly her father's step; yet there was something different about it. Sylvia had not listened so intently for that step upon the gravel outside the door not to be familiar with the slightest change in it.

"Well!" said she, softly, as one speaks to one's own heart, "what is the matter with father?"

Pressing her face to the pane and shutting off with her hands the light from the fire, she saw a figure, indistinct and shadowy, stoop, lift the great rock that formed the cabin doorstep, and rise again. The next moment she heard a hand feeling cautiously in the darkness for the latch-string.

Eager and expectant, full of the happiness of being once more able to go and meet him, Sylvia turned to the door, still leaning upon Joe's gift, her face aglow, her heart full of joy. At the very first glimpse of his face she stopped, the little wooden prop slipped from her hand and rolled down upon the floor.

"Father," said she, "what has happened to you-uns?"

The face turned to hers was pale and anxious; the eyes had a furtive, frightened look in them. At the sound of the child's voice Tom rallied and tried to shake off the spell that held him.

"Why, honey," said he, "there ain't anything the matter—" At the same moment he glanced over his shoulder in a guilty, frightened way, as though an unseen danger were dogging his steps.

The child stood staring a moment, then suddenly burst into tears. Instantly Tom was himself again. He stooped and lifted the frail form in his arms.

"Why, honey," said he, "what ails you, to take on so? Ain't you glad to see your pappy? Or air you just mad some bekase he's so late? Well, now, if you just could 'a' seen them horses huggin' that old bluff in the storm you'd feel like huggin' the old driver some, sure, for pilotin' of 'em safe down that thar mount'n.

That you would. And what's all this that I see here?"

He dropped into a chair, the child upon his knee, and reached his hand for the little wooden crutch. Instantly Sylvia's tears ceased to flow; "It's my crutch," she cried, joyfully. "Joe fetched it to me. Now, see me walk!"

And walk she did, the slight arm carried over the crutch, the tip of the shortened foot just touching the floor, a smile wreathing the lips that had wellnigh forgotten how to smile. In the stage driver's eyes the quick tears gathered; "now, if that ware not clever of Joe Bentley," said he. "I'll reckerlect that o' Joe. Git out thar an' let me see you do it again."

And again the graceful little body tripped carefully across the old puncheon floor while Tom looked on, the smile under his shaggy beard a match to the smile beaming in the child's delighted eyes.

"Fust rate," declared Tom, "fust rate. I'll do somethin' for Joe Bentley, sure's my name's Tom Tate; see if I don't. Why, honey, with

such skippin' as that we'll soon be runnin' away to Fluridy."

"A-walkin', you mean," laughed Sylvia. "I reckon that'll be the quickest way we-uns'll ever git to Fluridy. But as for me, I'm content to walk here in Tennessee, if only so I can walk."

"But we won't walk; we'll ride in the steam cyars, big as anybody; see if we don't. I tell y–o–u—"

He glanced over his shoulder again in that startled, furtive way that was half fear, half surprise, and said no more.

"Did you hear somethin'?" said Sylvia.

He answered her more sharply than he had ever spoken to her in all her life.

"No, I ain't heeard nothin', an' I can't see as you-uns have got any call to be spyin' on yer own pappy, an' suspicionin' of him, an' takin' of him up so sharp like, as though he'd gone an' done somethin' to be afeard on."

Aunt Jane put her head in at this moment to say the supper was ready and Tom strode off to the other room without so much as a look at

Sylvia, who stood staring after him for a moment through the tears that his unusual sharpness brought to her eyes. She followed him out to supper, but her appetite was gone. She was afraid to speak to him again. She had never seen him in such a mood; something had happened, she felt sure of that. But she had a comfort in her crutch. She slipped off into her aunt's room and walked about there for an hour, while Tom sat moodily in the corner, that furtive, frightened look upon his face, forgetting everything but the one thing which refused to be shaken off. Long after Sylvia was in bed, and, as he thought, asleep, he got up and went out, leaving the door ajar. Instantly the little figure upon the lounge just under the window lifted itself in bed and peeped through the panes to see if he might be going away. Through the open door a broad blaze of light issued that fell athwart the doorstep, and full in the centre of it she saw the figure of her father, kneeling, peering under the old rock step.

She pretended to be asleep when he returned, and soon she heard him snoring over in his bed. But before he went to bed she saw him pick up her crutch and examine it carefully, and heard him in a low voice again make a promise of rewarding Joe.

When Sylvia awoke the next morning Tom was gone, but on the pillow beside her lay the big golden orange that Joe had sent and Tom had forgotten the night before.

Joe's gift; she had many tokens of the boy's generous nature. Had she known what her friend was suffering at that moment she would indeed have had many tears to shed for him — poor, unfortunate, unhappy Joe. Sitting by his grandmother's couch, a frightened look upon his face, and a strange, horrible fear at his heart, begging her not to believe it, not to believe he was a thief, could this be the helpful, honest fellow that only yesterday had whistled and sung in the winter woods?

At the inn the excitement still prevailed.

Mr. White refused to have the boy punished or any definite charge made against him until the house and barn and stage coach had been thoroughly searched.

"I'll stripe him in a way that will last him till he dies," said Bentley. "Stealin' from my guests! I'll show him. He's Lige Bentley's son, sir, and that's enough. He's got a bad name for an inheritance. Lige ware a born law-breaker."

"Well, he must be proved guilty before he is punished," said the manufacturer. "He hasn't the bearing of a rogue, and I shall give him a chance; though the 'inheritance' is against him, I admit."

"Inherits a bad name." Joe heard the words and again his heart sank. He had no idea of that great and mighty machinery we call law; nor how, in order to make guilt more sure, the first step is often to prove the bad character and the bad ancestry of one suspected. Every day he lived he learned more surely the value of a good name. He had inherited a bad one. He thought of old Jube Jarvis and his parting

advice, and burying his face in his grandmother's lap Joe shed the first tears that had come to relieve his suspense.

"Nobody don't believe me," he sobbed. "Everybody thinks I took the money."

"Thar's one as knows better than to believe such," said granny. "I knows you didn't, son, an' don't you be afeard. Innocence ain't a-goin' to suffer long. I'll trust the good Lord for that."

Her faith was a comfort to him; it sent him out to help in the search for the lost money.

"I ware plumb give over to grief," he told himself as he crossed the yard. "I forgot I had any friends; I forgot granny, an' Tom, too; of course Tom will not believe 'em."

But a new disappointment awaited him at the barn. Tom had been there and gone home again, after hearing about the loss of the three hundred dollars. He had not even tried to speak a word of comfort, or of doubt as to his guilt.

"Just bolted off like lightnin' streck him,"

one of the men who had congregated with the first hint of excitement told Joe. "Lit out like he ware called to git up and go at once."

It was true; Tom had been over; he came late, though he had left home early. He had stepped into the barn and begun feeding the horses when Bentley came over from the house. The musty old barn was shadowy, even in daylight, and the light uncertain. Tom had stood with his back to the door when Bentley entered, but one hand was in the pocket of his greatcoat, tightly clasping the black stock of a pistol.

"Hello, thar!" Bentley had called in a voice that made the brown bridle hand fasten itself more closely about the weapon in Tom's pocket.

"Well," said the stage driver, "I'm here. No need o' hurry, I reckon, with all this here snow on the ground."

"Hurry!" exclaimed Bentley, angrily. "Hurry be blasted! Hain't you-uns heard how that thar ungrateful neffew o' mine's gone

an' robbed a passenger out o' three hundred dollars?"

There was no need to feign surprise now. Tom actually dropped against the fodder rack, gasping and frightened.

"Joe!" said he. "Surely Joe ain't any thief. Say, now, they don't s'pect Joe Bentley, surely?"

"But they do," said Bentley, with an oath. "The thievin' little rascal. If that thar money ain't forthcomin' in an hour I'm goin' to tee-totally take the hide off'n him an' then have him arrested."

Tom grew sick with horror, yet he made an effort, one faint effort, in Joe's behalf.

"He didn't do it, Mr. Bentley," he declared. "I know Joe didn't steal nuthin'."

"Then who in thunder did?" demanded the innkeeper.

"I—I—why I—don't know, Mr. Bentley, but—not Joe."

"Shut up, then," said Bentley. "In course Joe done it. Ware not the money in the over-

coat pocket, where the owner put it just before leavin' the stage? He took it out to divide it on the way down, an' Mr. Thompson took half, bekase it ware too much to risk in a heap. An' when the storm come on Mr. White crammed his package in his coat pocket for a minit when the stage ware swingin' round a dang'rous curve, an' he plumb forgot to change it. Last night he saw that thar boy layin' on the floor, whar he hadn't no business to be, an' he got up an' flung the coat over him, like a born idiot, an' this mornin' boy an' money ware both gone."

"Gone!" cried Tom. "Air Joe gone?"

"Don't be a fool, Tom," said Bentley. "Whar'd he go, I'd like to know. He's goin' somewhars, though, an' mighty fast, I can tell you, if that thar money ain't found foreshortly. I've come down here to overhaul the stage, bekase that thar idiot up thar won't have it no other way but that thar's some mistake."

Joe suspected! The earth seemed turning upside down to Tom Tate. Scarcely knowing what he did he assisted in the search for the

missing wallet. That done—he alone understood how useless the search would be—he struck off through the orchard toward home. When in sight of his cabin he suddenly whirled around and turned off into a by-path leading deep into the heart of the woods. He wanted time to think; his brain was on fire, his heart was as ice in his bosom. He had forgotten the snow and the cold; he remembered only that Joe was in distress; in danger, indeed, for Tom knew old Bentley too well to suppose that he would spare the lad who, he supposed, had brought suspicion upon his house. Joe, who had done so much to lighten and brighten the little straitened life in the cabin among the cedars! Tom thought of all this as he trudged off through the snow, away from himself and his accusing conscience. He recalled that midnight tramp for the doctor when Sylvia was sick; the birds he had trapped with which to tempt her delicate appetite; and the crutch upon which he had seen her hopping about like a little broken-winged bird that had forgotten everything but how to sing. And

then Tom remembered the fearful, fateful package under the old stone doorstep.

"I didn't think o' this," he groaned. "I didn't think of it fallin' upon Joe when I picked up that thar wallet lyin' upon the floor of the stage whar that rich man drapped it. I didn't think o' trouble to nobody; I only thought o' my little suff'rin' one, an' how the rich man would never miss it. An' now, what can I do? To fetch it back means the prison; to keep it means everlasting torture."

Torture! Aye, if an outraged conscience can torture, poor Tom must feel its heavy hand upon him. He lifted his face to the skies, cold, leaden, heavy with the snow clouds.

"Oh, Heaven!" he prayed, "help me, help me, help me!"

No cry in time of temptation ever yet failed to reach God's ear, or to have His help. And to Tom help came straight and prompt and perfect. Instantly, the prayer still warm upon his lips, he turned sharply around and struck off briskly in the direction of his home.

"I'll fetch it back an' own up square," said he, "if it kills me."

He walked straight home; straight to his own doorstep; and, stooping, slipped his hand under the old rock step. The next moment his startled cry of alarm rang through the mountain like the cry of some creature in pain.

The wallet was gone.

CHAPTER XI

CONFESSIONS

Tom Tate had resolved to return home and get the wallet, which, upon the impulse, he had concealed and appropriated, and, returning it to the owner, confess his own part in the transaction. It was his first crime, and was done upon impulse with the needs of his afflicted daughter bearing upon his heart. He had not considered how his own sin might fall unjustly upon some innocent one; nor yet how Sylvia would despise any help that might come to her other than in an honest way. For, child as she was, Sylvia was a bravely conscientious little soul. But finding the wallet gone, Tom found himself at a loss what to do. Confess! That seemed to be the only thing left him, since it was the only thing that would clear Joe. He did not give himself time to consider, but, after the first shock of sur-

prise was over, he went into the house, half hoping some one might by accident have found the money. Though this he regarded as hardly possible, since the old step had never been removed until his own hand had made it a hiding place for stolen property. The money had evidently been taken away by some one who had seen him place it there. For a moment his heart grew cold with fear. Then he found himself hoping the dreadful secret might be kept from Sylvia until he could confess it with his own lips.

But Sylvia was not in the house. To his demand for her his sister answered with a stare: "Why, I allowed she ware a-sittin' same as common in the room thar."

A thorough search failed to find her; she was gone; for the first time in months she had left the house.

"You didn't meet her, I reckon," said Miss Tate, "as you come along?"

"No, I come the long way; around back, through the woods," said Tom. "Surely the child has not set out through this snow."

"I dunno now," said the sister. "Jim Byers's boy rid by here a bit ago goin' to mill, and stepped in a minit to say Joe had been tuk up for stealin' from one o' the stage coach passengers last night. Silvy ware mightily upset by it; cried consider'ble. Though we-uns knowed it ware not so. We knowed Joe Bentley air no thief."

Poor Joe! The simple words would have brought comfort indeed to his bruised heart at that moment, as he sat alone, with the key turned upon him, in the little room that had been his grandmother's. His uncle had locked him in. Neither Mr. White nor Mr. Thompson had asked that it be done, but the angry Bentley had determined to force a confession from the rebellious boy, Tom went back to the Rock House full of his own confession, and full of uneasiness as to Sylvia.

"She'll take her death o' cold," he told himself, as he trudged along through the snow. Then it occurred to him that she might only have gone to the house of a neighbor down the

road a piece, and he turned back to see if this should be so.

"Just proud o' bein' able to walk thar," was his thought.

Meanwhile, matters at the Rock House were growing serious enough. A constable had come in and the house had been thoroughly ransacked for the missing wallet.

Mr. Thompson had determined to make a last effort to get Joe to confess that he had taken the money. He went into the room where the boy had been confined, and locking the door behind him, drew a chair over into the corner where Joe sat weeping.

"Now," said he, "Joe, my boy, this is a serious business. I have come to talk to you earnestly about it, and I wish you to talk to me, plainly, Joe and freely; above all I wish you to talk to me truthfully."

Joe lifted his haggard face; a sullen expression had come into the eyes that had looked on life's most sombre ways.

"I ain't got anything to say," said he, "any

more than I've done said. You can believe it or no, I can't help it."

"Come—come now," said the attorney, "I am only trying to help you; you must meet me half way. It is Mr. White's money that is missing, not mine. Mr. White is a kind man; he was once a very, very poor boy himself, and has a deep sympathy for boys situated as he was. His shops are full of them to-day. He doesn't wish to have you punished; indeed, I am sure it would pain him very much to be obliged to have to do so. He only wishes to recover his money. We are both willing, Joe, to consider your youth in this matter, and the hard life you have had. We are willing to believe that seeing a way out of your unhappy situation you were tempted beyond your strength."

Joe lifted his head at this, an angry gleam in his eyes.

"No, sir," said he, "I ware not. I never ware tempted to steal. Never!"

In spite of himself Mr. Thompson found it impossible not to believe in the unfortunate,

hard-pressed boy; still, the circumstances were so fearfully against him.

"Well," said he, "I have just this to say: if you will go quietly and get the wallet and hand it to me, no more shall be said about it—not a word. If you refuse—why there's money enough in that wallet to send you to the penitentiary, Joe."

"I can't help it," said Joe. "I never took nobody's money. I never stole nothin' in my life, as I knows on. If I have to go to prison for nothin,' I can go. I reckon it can't be much worser'n it have been here."

The attorney, a man accustomed to crime and to dealing with criminals, felt spring to his eyes something moist and warm, that slipped down his cheek and lay like a silver dew-drop upon his hand; a bright, sympathetic tear. Yet Joe did not see it; and since the voice speaking to him lost nothing of its seriousness, he did not suspect that his forlorn and hopeless condition had awakened in the stern lawyer's bosom a quick and tender sympathy.

What he said to himself was: "If it comes to the worst I shall defend this boy to the last moment, without a cent of pay or a hope of reward." What he said to Joe was:

"Yes, Joe, it is a good deal worse than this place. The penitentiary is a place where few good men go in, and fewer come forth; a place where boyhood perishes in its birth, and crime takes hold upon the throat and kills the life of innocence; a place where hope dies and virtue stagnates; a place where vice sits upon a throne and deals out poison to the souls about her; a hovel where crime and pestilence and guilt are bred; where virtue and peace and hope die upon the instant. Woe, woe to the boy so unfortunate as to find an entrance there. And besides all this, Joe, it is the death, the very death, of your good name."

"Yes, sir," said Joe, "that's what I ware thinkin' of. That air the hard part. I promised —Jube—Jarvis—to—keep—a—good—name." And, breaking utterly down, poor Joe buried his face in his hands and sobbed aloud.

The attorney was perplexed; there was not a hint of guilt about this boy, yet who else could have touched the coat? The owner did not pull it off until after supper, for the old Rock House was cold. Suddenly, with a lawyer's keen instinct, he turned to Joe, and said:

"Have you any idea, Joe, as to who might have taken the money?"

Joe drew quickly back, an expression of alarm flitting across his face.

"I ain't turned track-hound for nobody," said he, with surly reluctance. "I ain't tryin' to run nobody down, I ain't."

The attorney rose.

"Come with me, sir," said he. Joe did not stir. "Come with me. I want witnesses to this talk." Still Joe did not move.

Mr. Thompson stepped to the door and beckoned the constable.

"Bring that boy into the sitting-room," said he, pointing to Joe.

The constable stepped briskly across the room

and laid his hand roughly upon Joe's collar; the boy struck at him angrily.

"Stop," said the attorney; "no violence there, if you please. You have no warrant yet; he is still my prisoner, not yours. You'd best come quietly, Joe."

Recognizing the folly of rebellion Joe followed the men into the sitting-room. His face wore a sullen, determined look; he had resolved not to say one word. At the best he had only a suspicion, and he was resolved not to say a word that could bring further trouble upon poor little Sylvia.

Quite a crowd had congregated in the sitting-room, and Bentley was charging up and down the room declaring he was an honest man himself and meant to clear his house of rogues even if it took away his own "neffew." In the midst of his tirade the men entered with Joe.

The attorney motioned him to silence.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I have brought this boy in here because I wish to talk to him where all may hear and judge for themselves. I do

not believe him to be a thief by nature, but this money is gone and circumstances point to him as the guilty party. He denies the theft. Now, I ask him before this company if he has any suspicion as to who did take the wallet belonging to my client." He stopped and looked at Joe. "We only wish," he added, "a clue to work upon."

But Joe stood sullen and silent, not so much as lifting his eyes. It certainly was a guilty face they saw before them now, with all the first defiance gone out of it.

"You'd better answer, Joe," said the lawyer. Still not a word from the accused boy.

"Did you take it yourself?"

Still Joe said nothing; he was afraid now to so much as protest his own innocence, lest the quick-witted lawyer should suddenly fix the guilt upon Tom.

"Very well, then," said the attorney, "I must conclude that you are the guilty party, and shall have to ask Mr. White to swear out the papers for your arrest."

From the doorway came a sharp cry of pain: "He didn't do it! I tell you Joe Bentley didn't steal your money! He didn't do it, I tell you!"

All eyes were turned in the direction of the voice. There, framed in by the gray, weather-beaten, old door, stood Sylvia, leaning hard upon her crutch, her bright hair, tossed by the wind, almost concealing the pale face that looked upon them from such startled eyes. She suddenly lifted her hand high above her head and tossed the familiar brown wallet into the midst of the group.

"Thar's your old money!" she cried, "an' Joe Bentley never touched it; never!"

For a moment there was intense stillness; then a voice demanded sharply:

"If Joe Bentley didn't take it, who did?"

It was the very question she had dreaded, and for which she had tried to prepare herself. The thin lips twitched spasmodically; the little crutch rolled to the floor and Sylvia staggered forward blindly, with a low "I done it; I stole the wallet."

It was the voice of the manufacturer that called out to those near the door:

"Catch that child, somebody!" and a pair of burly arms were opened to receive her as Sylvia fell forward.

They knew at once that she had not committed the crime; but before they could express themselves another figure had darkened the old doorway. The figure of a man, who strode forward and lifted the crippled girl in his arms, tenderly stroking the white temples. When the blue eyes looked into his, with their familiar recognition, he turned to the attorney:

"I be the man you air after," said he. "I took the wallet. I didn't mean to take it, an' it's the first thing I ever did take. I ware tempted o' Satan. When I see it a-layin' thar on the floor o' the coach, shaking in my very face all the hunderds and hunderds o' things I could git for my 'flicted chil', I couldn't help a-takin' it; I couldn't help it. I never meant to take it; an' I never meant to hurt nobody else by it. An' this mornin' when I heeard that

Joe was under s'picion I went home to fetch it back an' s'render both it and myse'f. An' when I looked for it under the old doorstep whar I had hid it, it ware gone. Then I said I'd come an' clear Joe anyhow. An', strangers, I have come."

There was silence in the room, save for a sob from the corner where Joe had turned away to weep. Granny had hobbled in, in time to hear Tom's confession. Her old face wore its familiar smile of perfect faith as she went over and laid her hand on Joe's bowed head.

"Your granny trested you, son," she said, in a voice meant only for Joe's ears. "Allers reckerlect that no matter what comes to you, your old granny air a-trestin' o' you. A boy hain't got any right to disapp'int them that trests in him."

"The little gal didn't tetch the money, strangers," Tom was saying, "exceptin' to fetch it back to you-uns. She ware only tryin' to shield me, an' to cl'ar Joe. I took it; only me. I ain't askin' for pardon, gentlemen; I only ask

you to look at—that. That's what tempted of me."

He thrust forward his big bridle hand, and in the palm of it lay Sylvia's little twisted foot.

There were tears in more eyes than Joe's as the little foot came to view; the great lawyer blew his nose with unnatural vigor; and Mr. White, in the sharp voice with which he had bidden some one catch the child when she fainted, a voice meant to hide his emotion, lifted his walking cane, and pointing to the door called out to Tom:

"Take that child home and care for her."

Care for her! That meant he was not to be prosecuted. No more was said about the wallet. Humanity is humanity after all, and full of the beautiful spirit of Christ. Tom's lesson had been quite enough for him, and would do its own work without further molestation. But the stage that carried the attorney and his client back to Knoxville the next week also carried Joe. The manufacturer had obtained permission of granny to take him away, and

put him into those wonderful shops that he had already learned to love.

"I'll come back for you, granny," said he at parting. "I'll come back for you some day when I git to be a man, see if I don't."

She knew better; she knew that long before Joe could have accomplished his ambitions she would be sleeping under the quiet shadows of the mountain. A hasty visit now and then was the most she could hope for. But she smiled, happy even in the long parting, because it meant so much of good to Joe. So she smiled and sent him off with her blessing and her love, that would follow him always, to the very end.

She knew that this man who had been touched with a feeling of sympathy for the boy treading the hard road that he, too, had traveled, would not forget, or forbear, to point out the dangerous places along the way. And knowing Joe's sturdy and honorable nature she felt that she could trust him, young as he was, to go into the world of men.

Sylvia had come over to the Rock House

to say good-bye; she stood leaning upon her crutch in the doorway, waving her hand in a last farewell. It was well for Joe that he could not see the tears that stood in Sylvia's eyes as she shouted to him in the old familiar way:

"Good-bye, Joe; don't forgit the mount'n!"

And Joe, seated beside his new friend in the lumbering old stage coach, made to himself a promise that he never, never would.

CHAPTER XII

AMONG NEW SCENES

It was with mingled feelings of pleasure and of pain that Joe took his seat in Tom's old stage. Pleasure, in that the life he had so ardently desired was at last opening before him; the old hardships were done with; injustice, that had rankled in the boy's heart at times, would disturb him no more. Yet he was not without his fears as well as regrets. He might not, after all, be fitted for the life before him; his doubts now were all of himself, his own worth and modest capacity. And then, the places that had been the scene of his struggles and of his misfortunes had become dear. The grim old mountain that had looked upon every hour of his life possessed a sort of protection after all; its shades had received many of his boyish confidences, and his tears had fallen, bitter drops, upon its silent ways.

It was like parting from his mother to say good-bye to the mountain. Every crack of Tom's whip seemed to be sweeping him miles and miles away from it.

As they neared the bend in the steep where little Sylvia was at that moment watching to see the stage pass, the tears started to his eyes, and turning his head Joe stealthily drew his rough sleeve across his face. Tom cracked his whip, the stage swept around the curve, and his mountain home lay behind him, passed out of his life forever, save for such influences and impressions as it had left upon his character. But hardship, if well directed, is a wonderful teacher; a mighty strengthener of mind and of muscle, and Joe had not failed of its benefits.

The parting with Tate was perhaps the hardest of all to Joe. Not that he loved Tom best, but that he seemed a part of the old life, and so long as he sat there on his box cracking his whip and shouting to his horses, the old life seemed, to some extent, to be going along with him. But after a few hours' travel this poor

link had to be broken, too. The stage was a trifle late; it reached the station at the foot of the mountain only a short time before the train was bulletined to start. It was all ready to go; the engine was puffing and blowing, the bell ringing, and the conductor shouting "All aboard!"

Mr. White felt rather glad there was so little time for leave-taking; he had been watching Joe carefully during the ride down the mountain, and he understood the terrible battle the boy was having with his first homesickness. It would make it somewhat easier, therefore, not to linger over Tom's farewell.

So he hurried Joe into the car and found seats for his party while his attorney attended to the tickets and secured a check for Joe's box. And Joe passed through it all like one in a dream; the changes came so often and so quickly that he had no time to regret one event until he was pushed on into another.

He did, however, regret Tom; why, he had not so much as shaken hands with Tom; and

"HERE'S YOUR OLD MONEY!" SHE CRIED
(Page 217)

the old stage driver had done him many a good turn, despite the late unhappy incident of the stolen pocket-book. Moreover, he had a message to send to granny by Tom. Granny would think he had forgotten her already; that his good fortune had turned his head at the very outset. Now, if he just could send that message back to the mountain!

Back to the mountain! He had left it then, indeed, since it was "back" to the mountain. At the thought something seemed to gather in his throat and choke him.

At that moment some one tapped upon the window, and, turning hastily, he saw Tom's brown face pressed against the glass. Tom's mouth was working, too, and his breath was marring the window glass; but Joe couldn't hear a word. The engine was letting off steam, and the glass effectually deadened the sound of his voice. Mr. White leaned forward and lifted the window, and in an instant Joe almost shot out of it into Tom's face.

"Good-bye, Tom," said he; "good-bye. An' I

want you to promise to take care of granny, Tom, in my stead; will you?"

This was the promise he had been eagerly waiting to extract from Tate, and which he had been so near missing.

"That I will," said Tom. "I gives you my word for it, I'll write you fair and square all that happens to her whilst you-uns air gone. I sha'n't forgit you, an' I sha'n't forgit that thar crutch."

There were tears in Tom's eyes, but Joe did not see them.

"Never mind the crutch," said he. "May be I'll learn to do better things than that bimeby. I've got a chance to learn—"

But Tom shook his head. "You may do bigger things," said he, "but your hands'll never turn a better job than that thar little wooden crutch; because it ware the work o' love an' pity. I'll allers remember you by that thar crutch, Joe Bentley, an' so will Silvy."

The people were rushing into their places; evidently the train would be moving in a moment. Joe leaned farther out the window.

"Tom," said he, "if I ever do make any money I'm goin' to send Silvy to Fluridy. You tell her so for me."

"All right," said Tom, laughing; "and she'll say, 'this crutch air as nigh Fluridy as I'll ever git.'"

But for once Tom was mistaken; evidently Sylvia was a better judge of human nature than Tom; for when he delivered Joe's message that night Sylvia did not so much as smile; she merely gathered her little prop under her arm and said:

"Well, he will if he can; that's all."

But Tom, making his good-byes at the car window, was not sorry to have a word to carry back to the little girl whose restricted life would indeed be lonely enough without the boy whose good heart had devised so many plans for her amusement.

"I'll tell her," he promised. "I'll tell her faithful, and I'll write you what she says."

The train began to move. Tom's brown bridle-hand was slipping from the window-sill

where his brown fingers held Joe's in a parting clasp.

"When you see Mr. Jarvis—tell—him—" the message was lost in the rolling of the wheels. But at the last moment Joe's head shot out the window again, and his fresh young voice rang out above the confusion and bustle of starting:

"Tell granny I've been well all this time."

Mr. White smiled. How long the hours must have been to the boy leaving, for the first time, his first and only home. The manufacturer glanced at his watch. They had left the Rock House at five o'clock, it was now eleven; to Joe it had been "all this time."

"Well, Joe," said he, "we must begin to think about getting home now."

The words sent Joe's thoughts off in a new line, and soon he began to look forward, instead of backward, and to enjoy the strange new country through which they were passing. The long, low levels were a beautiful wonder to him, and the rivers seemed sluggish and half asleep

after the swift, swirling rush of the mountain streams. And the railroad train; he had seen it at a distance once before. But this was the first time he had ever been in one of the handsome coaches with their trimmings of brass and beveled mirrors reproducing with kaleidoscopic fascination the scenes through which the brave old engine was dragging them.

Mr. White let him alone; he understood that the boy was occupied with the strangeness of his surroundings, and that these were quite enough to fill his thoughts for the moment. But as the evening drew on and objects outside became less distinct, he saw the little old-young face pressed against the window-pane begin to take on its former expression of gloom. For an hour he sat thus, struggling with his own longings and memories. After a while the porter came in and lighted the lamps, but Joe paid no attention to it.

The travelers had made their last change of cars and were entering now upon the coal regions not far from the city of Knoxville. Mr. White had been talking with his lawyer

most of the time, but he never once lost interest in Joe's battle with himself.

Suddenly he saw the boy's face brighten; he half rose in his seat and uttered an exclamation of wonder and delight.

"Well, Joe," said the manufacturer, "what do you think of it all?"

They were passing alongside a row of ovens, and the glow from the burning coke streamed across the earth and the sky, lighting up the dark blue of the heavens with real splendor.

"Oh, sir," said Joe, "if granny could only see that. It air surely the glory of God!"

"Manifested through His works," said Mr. White. "But wait until you see the big furnaces, Joe, where they melt the iron and make it into bars; then you will realize something of the goodness of God in storing the earth with so much for man's use. We shall be at home now in a few hours."

At home! It sounded so good. Joe leaned his head against the back of the seat and pictured to himself the night closing in upon the

mountain. Already the lamps were lighted, or the pine knots; granny was knitting in the corner of the fireplace; crickets were chirping under the old rock hearth. Joe was fast asleep.

Mr. White, sitting opposite, studied the face before him carefully. It was a dark face, a good deal sunburned, too, and thin now, almost to gauntness. But that defect would soon right itself. Those little drooping lines about the mouth might disappear, too, in time, as the old life gradually weakened in his memory. The lips were set in a way that indicated strength, endurance and unyielding purpose. The eyes, he knew, were truth's own. His impulses were slow, cautious, but once decided, nothing could change him. But that which troubled his benefactor was a certain mistaken goodness that would allow the world to trample upon him—impose upon his generous nature.

"That must be corrected," the manufacturer told himself. "Master Jes will be the very first one to take advantage of that weakness, unless I keep a sharp lookout."

Then, after a moment of silent thought, during which he again made a careful scrutiny of the face lying against the velvet seat: "What a splendid foil for each other, Joe and Jes. Joe's caution, set off against the impulsive daring of Jes; the uncompromising conscientiousness of one against the inclination to shirk in the other; this boy's quiet yielding against Jes's sturdy aggressiveness; Joe's doubts against Jes's unswerving faith in himself. They are a good pair; my boy's quickness will stimulate the lagging spirit of the mountain boy, too. I shall watch the development of their characters with peculiar interest."

Mr. Thompson, who had been in the smoker, entered at this moment, and, touching the manufacturer lightly upon the shoulder, said:

"Getting into Knoxville, sir."

"Into Knoxville? Why, where has the time gone?"

The attorney looked at his watch.

"We are due at seven forty; it lacks but ten minutes of it. Shall I call Joe up?"

Not more than half awake, Joe was swept along by the crowd upon the platform; it was all a part of the dream he had been dreaming when Mr. Thompson awakened him; the lights, the shrieking of locomotives, the jangling of street-car bells, and the cries of cabmen calling for passengers. But distinct enough he heard the low, deep voice of the attorney saying:

"There is your carriage, Mr. White, and Morrison is coming for your satchel."

A tall driver stepped forward, relieving the master of his valise, and leading the way to where the carriage waited.

He had not noticed the strong, rather awkward-looking mountain boy following at his master's side, until, reaching the carriage, Mr. White stepped back and said:

"Come, Joe; jump in."

Joe dropped back among the soft cushions, too ignorant and too innocent, as yet, to find anything to contrast between himself and his new surroundings. Mr. White spoke to his attorney:

"Get in with us, Thompson?"

"No, there is my car. I'll catch it and go straight home. My wife will feel anxious. Good-night; see you to-morrow."

Mr. White took the seat by Joe, and gave the driver his orders.

"Home, Morrison, as fast as you can get there. I am as hungry as a bear, and as sleepy."

Sleepy he might be, but Joe was wide enough awake at last, and keenly alive to his new situation. The street lamps were like lost stars, flitting through the night; aimless, but for their one duty of shining. The towering buildings on either side the streets seemed all to be on fire. Mr. White explained nothing; he was not much of a talker at any time, and he had some curiosity to see how the great change would appeal to Joe. Then, too, he was thinking, as this boy at his side always set him thinking, of a night in a far-away December when another boy had drifted into Knoxville, a stranger and unused to the city's strangeness.

The difference between the two was slight, though the circumstances were different. The other boy had come alone; strayed in from outside the city, where he had either wandered from, or been deserted by, a wandering band of gypsies. Previous to his life among the gypsies the boy had a dim recollection of a tent, a ring, and tiers of laughing, shouting people. Then the gypsies came along; how, he never knew, but he afterward learned to believe that the dull and timid boy was a burden to the circus company and to his mother.

He glanced at the face at his side, radiant and wondering, open and honest, too, as the good daylight; and he told himself that the boy Joe had at least one good branch in his pedigree.

"That counts for much," he whispered in his own heart. "If I had had a good mother—"

There flitted before his mind the vision of a light, lithe creature leaping through space and alighting, amid the yells of a coarse multitude, upon the back of a flying steed.

He closed his eyes to shut out the picture, if

might be, and fell to thinking of that far-away December night when he had strayed into Knoxville, and had chanced to knock at the right door. Chanced? No, he did not believe that such chances could be. He had lived to tell himself that it was God's own hand had led him that night to the door of the good woman who had taken him into her home and her heart, and had made indeed a son of him.

The carriage drew up to a tall, dark house, with shutters carefully drawn, and stopped. But when the coachman ran lightly up the steps and rang the bell, the opening of the door let out such a sudden dash of warm, rich light that for a moment Joe was quite blinded by the brightness.

A moment later the blistered and bruised feet, so often torn with the stones upon the mountain's side, sunk gratefully and restfully into the softly-padded carpet of his new home. He stood alone for a moment in the great hallway with only Mr. White, who was removing his overcoat. Joe tried to express something

of the gratitude he felt, but he did not find speech so easy to-night.

"I know sir," said he, "that I'd ought to thank you for all you've done, but you see I never see anything like all this in my life; an' somehows it appears like I can't think o' no words to say."

"Well, Joe," said Mr. White, "the way to show your gratitude is to endeavor to be happy in my house, and to improve the opportunities that have come to you."

There was a rush of footsteps coming down the stairs, and a voice in remonstrance, mingled with the high, distinct tones of a boy's voice in angry defiance. The next moment a boy's figure came bounding down the steps; a straight, slight little figure, and graceful as a deer, clad in a suit of soft, clinging black, with a bright scarlet tie at the throat, and about the delicate temples golden locks, that clung to the pretty round head with girlish grace.

The figure came down the broad steps two at a time, but with the last bound landed lightly

and defiantly face to face with the master of the house and his new protegé.

Behind him, coming decidedly more slowly, was a tall, slender lady with white hair, and wearing an expression of deep annoyance. A flush overspread the lady's face when she found herself so suddenly ushered into the presence of the master of the house, and she opened her lips to speak; but the young athlete was before her. He lifted his eyes—such pleading, roguish eyes they were, yet withal not without a trace of melancholy, too, to the master's face.

"May I not stay, sir? May I not sit up a while with you and the new boy? Morrison said at noon that a telegram had come ordering a room for a new boy. I haven't seen a boy in this house since I have been in it, and I just couldn't go to bed. I have told Mrs. Mallory I am not a baby to be tucked into a crib at eight o'clock."

"Indeed, sir," the lady interposed, "I am ashamed to be the cause of such a stormy welcome, but he is not well. Just feel his hands, sir, and see how fevered he is."

But the boy clasped his hands behind him angrily.

"Indeed I am not sick," he replied. "I won't be sick."

And that one expression, "I won't be sick," was the key to Jes's character.

"Come! come!" said the master, "alter your tone, my little man, then I am ready to talk to you. Mrs. Mallory," turning his back upon Jes and addressing the housekeeper, "this is the young gentleman for whom I telegraphed you to have a room in readiness. I found him in the mountains. Bentley is his name, and he will henceforth be one of the family. Joe, come here and shake hands with my housekeeper."

The lady took the extended hand, holding it a moment between her own, and saying some gentle word of welcome. Joe never knew what it was she said, or what he said in reply. His eyes, as well as his thoughts, were given entirely to the boy, Jes, the handsome young fellow who, now quiet enough, was regarding him with a

sort of stare that held both surprise and pleasure.

Then, for the first time in his life, Joe felt conscious of his own awkward limbs and his rough, outgrown clothes. For the first time in his life he understood what a beautiful specimen of freshness and of grace a boy could be. And good breeding, too; for despite his stormy introduction, Jes did not show the slightest amusement, or, what might have hurt more, pity for the odd, old-fashioned figure which Joe at once realized he must have presented in his short pantaloons, showing several inches of coarse yarn stocking, and the sleeves reaching half way to his elbow. But if Jes saw the coarse shoes, the rumpled, unbleached, unstarched shirt, or the patched elbows of Joe's jeans jacket, he gave no sign. Jes, in truth, saw a boy—that was all; to Jes it was quite enough.

He waited for his uncle to offer some sort of introduction, or to say more, at any rate; but when he saw him going off to the library without another word, he could stand the uncer-

tainty no longer, and burst out in his impulsive way:

"Is he going to stay? Oh, uncle, I do hope he is going to stay." Then, as the master said nothing: "Say, are you going to live with us, boy? Have you truly come to stay?"

Joe looked helplessly at Mr. White, but that gentleman was talking to the housekeeper, and Joe was left to speak for himself.

"Yes," said he, in his most pronounced mountain drawl, "I reckin so."

"Then don't say 'reckin,'" said Jes, promptly; "say 'suppose.' Oh, we will have a great time now, uncle!"

Mr. White smiled; his nephew's delight in the new member of the household pleased him, as did Jes's manner of ignoring the new boy's appearance. Had he really not observed, he wondered, or was he simply too kind to appear to notice? There were some good qualities about Jes; some very good traits indeed. To his predictions of a "good time" the master replied:

"Well, we will see about that. All depends upon how you treat each other. Now, Mrs. Mallory, some supper, and when we have eaten I am going to send these young gentlemen off to the library to get acquainted with each other. Wouldn't you like that, Joe?"

"I reck—suppose so, sir," said Joe. The master of the house again smiled; he had noticed Jes's correction of the new boy's speech, and he chuckled as he went off to his room before going in to supper, and told himself that "Jes would root out that dialect in less than a month."

After supper he sat in his own little study, seeing through the open door leading into the library the two boys, seated side by side before the fire, "getting acquainted" after their own boyish ideas. What a contrast they presented; the brown, sturdy mountain fellow, more than two years younger than the white, delicate boy of the city. Their very clothes indicated the contrast of their characters; the gray jeans and the soft black cloth. But Mr.

White's eye saw deeper than the clothes when he whispered to himself:

"The mountain boy has had the better chance. But Jes has his fine traits, too; his nature would not have brooked the schooling that Joe has had, but he will imbibe much of the mountaineer's strength. And he will bring that country boy out like a piece of polished silver—unless the boy permits him to lord it over him, and so forfeits Jes's respect."

The housekeeper tapped lightly at the door opening off the hall, and to Mr. White's "Come in," she entered and asked if Jes had not best be sent to his room.

"He has been feverish for two days," she explained. "And yesterday he was in bed the most of the day."

"No," was the reply, "let him alone. Perhaps his own determination not to be sick is the best medicine after all. Sit down, Mrs. Mallory; I want to talk to you a moment about this new boy who has come among us. I wish to tell you the whole sad story of his life, so that

you will feel and show for him the same kind affection and care that you have given my nephew. But first, I wish to ask you to look after some more suitable clothes for him. I should like a suit for him to put on in the morning, and another, which can be procured later, for better wear. I am going to take him into the shops at once—next week. Next year he must go to school; this year I shall leave him to Jes, however. Jes will teach him more than he will get at any school just now. Moreover, it would do him more harm than good to be dropped down into a city school at his age, not knowing how to read and write; indeed, not knowing how to talk, you might say. He has been unfortunate, particularly unfortunate, Mrs. Mallory. And finding him situated as he was, with the true nobility of character that he possesses, I felt it my duty, no less than a desire, being a bachelor with plenty, to rescue and place in a position where it could pass something of its greatness on to others this fine, promising character."

Then and there he told Mrs. Mallory Joe's

story. When he had finished the good woman was drying her tears.

"Poor boy," said she; "poor boy. I hope we shall not find him either too sensitive or too dull, sir. Boys brought up like that are apt to be one or the other. There, sir! Are they quarreling already?"

Through the open door came the sound of a voice—Jes's voice, shrill and indignant.

"Well!" said he, "I should think you certainly would be ashamed of yourself; that I should."

CHAPTER XIII

FIRST LESSONS

The acquaintance in the library was progressing. After the supper, which to Joe had been only a part of the glitter and confusion of the last two days, Mr. White had led his charge to the library, where Jes was awaiting them curled up among the silken pillows on the sofa. He rose promptly when they appeared, and said:

"Uncle, I think I must have been very rude to Mrs. Mallory to-night, and I am going at once and apologize. I have been thinking about it all this time, and now I know I was wrong."

Mr. White laid his hand upon Jes's little round head, stroking the short curls tenderly.

"Oh, Jesse! Jesse!" said he, "if you only would learn to do your thinking first; your sober second thought is always so true; you've got to look out for those ugly impulses, my boy. Go

on now, and set yourself right; then come back, I wish you to show Joe over the house. His room opens off your own; show him that. Then when you are through you may sit a while here together, if you like."

If they "liked." The master smiled as he saw them run off together, so unlike in every particular save the bounding, boyish heart in the bosom of each. He was glad, indeed he felt rewarded already, that he had brought them together; then, as he turned away to his study he thought again of that night when he first strayed into Knoxville. There was nobody there to take off the newness of that night but a lady, a good, good woman, and a frail little girl, who had, years afterward, developed a wonderful voice, and who had become Jes's mother. They had called each other "brother" and "sister," and had loved each other as such. And when she died she gave him her boy to father. The boy was "the mother's own self again," he had told himself many times.

At that moment the boy was enjoying him-

self not a little in piloting Joe over the big house. The rooms were so large and so beautiful; Joe would have lingered in each, but that Jes hurried him along until they stood in Joe's own special apartment. And all the time the mountain boy was admiring the beautiful things about him he was thinking of granny, fast asleep by this time, in the leaky old Rock House far away up on the mountain. Everything was so strange; there wasn't a thing in all his surroundings that touched in any way his life among the hills. Only his rough jacket and short old trousers seemed natural. He glanced at his frayed sleeve and unconsciously patted the patch granny had set there preparatory to his going away. And right there he resolved that he would keep that little old patched jacket as long as he lived, so much of granny's love and patience seemed to have been stitched into it. And he resolved that should he ever make any money of his own that she should know what it was to have nice, comfortable things, too.

"This is the gas." Jes was rattling off his

information at a great rate. "Did you ever see any gas? Because if you didn't you might get yourself smothered."

Involuntarily Joe stepped quickly back from the little harmless-looking jet of flame. But Jes didn't laugh, not once.

"Do it burn iron?" said Joe. "Is the—the iron stick a-burnin'?"

"No," said Jes, "it is gas; it comes up through that iron pipe, and when you've got enough of it you just whisk it off—so." Jes suited the action to the word, much to the country boy's wondering delight. "And," he went on, after getting hold of a match, "you light it—so." And again the little flame shot up from the pipe.

"I suppose you burn lamps in the mountains?" said Jes.

"Lamps an' pinuts," said Joe. "At the Rock House thar—"

"Say 'there,'" Jes interrupted. "Don't ever say 'thar.' And what in the world are 'pinuts'?"

"Pinuts come out o' the woods," Joe ex-

plained. "Granny used to burn 'em mostly. They air fat chunks, you know, off the pine trees. Knots, an' they burn toler'ble fair of a cold night."

"Oh," said Jes. "You must say pine knots, not 'pinuts.' Now we will go down and see the best of all—the books."

When Joe had carefully scanned the long, well-filled shelves in the library, his guide threw back the glass doors of a smaller case and exclaimed exultantly:

"These are mine, every one of them. Shall we read now?"

He drew from the shelf a story-book, handsomely bound and illustrated; and curling himself up on the sofa made room for Joe beside him. Suddenly he chanced to look at Joe's face; the book slipped from his fingers and fell to the floor; the disappointment was too great.

"Oh," said he, "don't you like books?"

Joe blushed and stammered; he was awkward and ashamed enough now, with this boy's eyes watching him so intently.

"Yes, I like 'em, I reck—suppose. I ain't never see any."

Jes literally bounded to his feet.

"Never saw any books!" said he. "Why, then, can't you read?"

Feeling himself almost as criminal as when he had hauled apples to the illicit still in the mountains, poor Joe stammered:

"No, I can't read."

It was at this moment that Jes turned from him in disgust, and his voice rang out so that his words reached the two in the study:

"Well! I should think you certainly would be ashamed of that; so I should."

"I am," was the low reply. "I am mightily ashamed of it."

"Well, then, why didn't you learn?"

"There ware no learnin' places where I ware born."

"No schools! Do you mean there were no schools?"

Joe nodded.

"Nairy blessed one."

Jes forgot the dialect in his surprise.

"No schools! Well, then," said he, "you needn't be ashamed at all, since it is not your fault, and you cannot help it. That which we can't help is our misfortune. I am sorry I spoke so quickly. Would like for me to read to you?"

Dear, honest, impulsive, generous Jes! Quick to err and as quick to undo. There was, as his uncle said, much that was beautiful and good in Jes.

The two boys curled themselves up again on the sofa—gray jeans and handsome broadcloth, polish and simplicity—side by side, so close that ere long the two heads were pressed together, and a rough, hardly-used hand united with a soft, girlish palm in supporting the big book's back.

For nearly an hour the reading went on, and then Jes, grown weary, closed the book.

"Oh, don't stop," Joe begged. "Don't stop yit. Please don't stop readin' of it yit."

Jes regarded him steadily.

"Say 'reading,'" said he, "not 'readin';' and never say 'yit.' It is y-e-t—yet. No, I am tired now; I wasn't very well, you know. But I say, would you like to learn to read?"

"Would I? Well, now, I would just rather learn to read as to do anything in this world."

"Well," said Jes, "I'll teach you to read if you like. And say, you mustn't mind my correcting, you know, because you must learn to talk properly."

"Oh, that's all right," said Joe. "And I certainly will be glad to learn. I'll do something for you, too, some time. Granny allers—"

"Always."

"Always said the time ware—"

"Was."

"Was sure to come when we could return favors, and I 'most know it'll come to us. But will we have time to learn?"

"Why, we've got every night," said Jes.

"I didn't know but I'd have to work nights," said Joe. "I used to work nights at the Rock House."

"Oh, you poor boy, you," said Jes. "I don't believe you truly know what it is to really rest and be happy."

"Yes, I do," said Joe. "I used to rest sometimes on the mountain while old Kit cropped the grass. I'd just lay back flat on the ground watchin' the clouds floatin' by overhead, and list'nin' to the flow of water through the laurel, so easy and gurglin' like, sorter singing there in the wilderness; and I felt that rested and happy I'd sometimes drop off to sleep and not wake up any more until Kit would rub her cold nose into my face. Then I'd jump up and find the moon risin' over the mountain, and the water still singin' in the laurel as sweet and sassy like. Did you ever hear the water running through a laurel brake?"

It was Jes's turn to acknowledge ignorance. He said "No," but at the same time he got up and went over to the piano, where he seated himself, and, slipping his slender fingers along among the white keys, said:

"Is it like this?"

Joe listened spellbound to the little rippling runs and trills. When he finished Jes looked around to find his listener silently weeping. The awkward, overgrown boy attempted to justify his emotion.

"It did sound so like the water slippin' down the mountain through the laurel," said he. "Somehow it made me—feel—feel—I don't know just how."

Jes got up softly and closed the piano.

"I know how you feel," said he. "It makes me cry, too, sometimes. My mother was a great singer, and she caught fire one night while singing in a big theatre and was burned to death. She didn't die until the next day, but they never let me see her. My father had wasted all her money and had died, and she wouldn't come and live with uncle because he was against her marrying. But they brought her here that night, and she died in this house. Her coffin stood right there by the window. It was white, and all buried under scarlet roses. She loved the red roses always, you see. Be-

fore she died she called my uncle and gave him me; what she said was: 'Take care of my baby, Ralph.' I was a little fellow then. But I remember it, and music always—seems—to—ch-o-ke—"

"I know," said Joe; "that's the way it did me. You ought to be glad to remember your mother, though, even if it does make you cry. I don't remember mine, but I know she was a good woman. And I've got a good granny, too. But I reckon my father done worse than waste money."

And then Joe told Jes the story of his life; of the lonely rides before daylight, and of the danger, the deadly danger, ever lurking over the illicit distillers.

When he finished Jes said:

"Weren't you awfully afraid? Going along in the dark that way with only an old mule for company? I should think you'd been frightened almost to death in the dark that way."

"No," said Joe, "I was only afraid of the sin of it all. Granny always said that sin is the

only thing a boy need be afraid of in this world. And it's so; there ain't anything else to hurt us, just only sin. Is your name White?"

"That's what they call me; yes. I took my uncle's name; he took my grandmother's; so I have only taken my own mother's name, after all."

"Boys! Boys! Bed-time."

Mr. White had looked in several times and hesitated to interrupt the growing acquaintance until the hands upon the study clock pointed to eleven. "Joe isn't accustomed to hours like these; you must teach Jes how to go to bed and to sleep at a reasonable hour, too, son."

Son! The word had a magical meaning for poor Joe. Long after reaching his own room the echo of the pleasant word lingered in his heart like a benediction.

The door between the boys' rooms was closed, but not fastened. Joe lingered over his preparations for bed, half hoping Jes would come in. Once he started to go for him, and did draw the door ajar, but he saw Jes with his back to

him busily preparing for sleep, and remembering that he was not well, Joe hesitated to disturb him again.

But the glance into Jes's room had awakened a new feeling in Joe's heart. Again he was contrasting himself and his coarse clothing with Jes. Across the foot of Jes's bed Joe saw a delicate white night robe, daintily ruffled and fluted; white curtains were looped back from the pillows with pale ribbons. Evidently neither labor nor love had been lacking to surround Jes with all things beautiful.

Joe thought of his own miserable boyhood and its unattractive surroundings, and for a moment his heart was full of bitter rebellion. Then his fingers accidentally came in contact with granny's patch, and his ugly feelings took flight. He had had as much genuine affection as any boy; it was only that the money had been lacking, perhaps, to render his life as easy as Jes's. At least that was what he told himself, not allowing himself to think otherwise.

"And leastways I couldn't help it," he told

himself, as he drew back the curtains and looked out upon the night. "I couldn't help it, and Jes said what we couldn't in no ways help was not our blame, but our misfortune."

The moon was shining; it was a comfort to think it was shining at the same moment upon the little cabins among the mountains where Sylvia and granny were lying asleep, dreaming it might be, of him. "Sylvia, and granny, and Jube," said Joe; "I sha'n't ever forget Jube." He couldn't sleep, and he stood at the window watching the moonlight, wishing that Jes would come in. At last he went again and looked into Jes's room. The gas was turned quite low, and in the semi-darkness he saw Jes, in his white night-shirt, quietly kneeling by his bed, saying his prayers.

It was like a soothing draught to Joe's tumultuous thought. He went back and was soon fast asleep in his own bed. And the same moon that looked down through the curtainless windows of the Rock House upon the old gray head resting upon its coarse, clean pillow, shone

for Joe, too, while he slept and dreamed of home.

Jes did peep in at last, but Joe was asleep and his gas turned off. Jes crept stealthily back and turned off his light also; he was accustomed to sleep with it burning, but to-night—well, there was something about the new boy from the mountains that made Jes ashamed of his cowardice. He felt afraid Joe might suspect that he burned his light because he was afraid of the dark. He remembered what Joe had told him of those lonely rides over the mountain, and how he had said it was only the sin of it that he feared. "Sin is the only thing a boy need fear in this world." And with granny's lesson in his heart Jes crept into bed. It was the last night he ever burned the gas because he was afraid of the darkness.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WONDERFUL SHOPS

When Joe awoke the morning after his arrival at Mr. White's, Morrison was standing at his bedside; the sun was streaming into the room, and there was a rush of water sounding in his ears. He sprang out of bed with a cry of alarm; for an instant he fancied the Rainbow Falls were near, and that he was late getting to the still.

Morrison smiled and hastened to reassure him.

"Your bath's awaiting, sir," said he, "and if you please, I am to help you with your dressing this one morning."

Help him with his dressing; how funny. Why he had been dressing himself ever since he put on his first breeches. But after Morrison was done with him Joe began to feel that it was the first time in his life that he had ever

known the luxury of a genuine toilet. The man first plunged him into a hot bath, after which he deluged him with a cold shower that sent the blood tingling through his veins in a way that made him wonder if it were water or very fine needles pricking into his flesh. And when it was over Morrison cut his hair and carefully brushed it, pared and polished his finger-nails, after which he put on him a new suit of plain, well-made clothes, flipped a spray of perfume into his face, and slipped a linen handkerchief into his breast pocket, with the tip of the deep hem just visible. Then he opened the door and announced that the master was waiting for him in the library.

Joe felt so awkward, so entirely ill at ease, that the servant took pity on him.

"Just try to feel as though you owned the place, sir," said he. "That's the way I do when I goes out to a new service, and it helps things to come handy, mightily."

Joe laughed, and forgot his awkwardness in fancying how funny it would be to try to feel

that Mr. White's big house belonged to him. Why, if he were master there he would—

And unconsciously Joe began to trip down the stairs in his pliable new shoes for all the world as Jes would have done.

He was laughing heartily at his "foolishness" when he reached the library door, and heard Jes exclaim:

"Why, how good you look! Doesn't he, uncle?"

"First rate," said Mr. White. "I wish you to feel at home, my son, in good clothing, and among delicate surroundings. Such things are refining, though not absolutely necessary by any means to the development of character. Remember that, if you are ever tempted to think too much of them. Whenever they become a temptation to you, such as debt, they are no longer refining, but, rather, degrading, and it is time to give them up. I refer, of course, to such things as undue adornment and those little things, harmless enough in themselves, but dangerous if given too much attention."

Joe was not destined to be spoiled by good clothes; he was glad to look a little more like Jes, whom he admired thoroughly, and glad to feel that the gap between them was, perhaps, beginning to narrow. Already he found himself trying to talk like Jes; already the slow old drawl of the mountaineer was disappearing, for Joe remembered very carefully the slightest correction made in his speech.

Mr. White left instructions with Jes to bring Joe down to the shops at eleven o'clock. And although Jes read and played on the piano, the hours dragged slowly until time for them to go.

"We must go by the book-store and get your books for studying," said Jes. "You ought to begin right away, you know."

"But I can't," said Joe. "I ain't got any money to buy the book yet, and I'll have to wait till I can make it."

"Why, it's only twenty-five cents," said Jes. "I can give you that much."

Joe shook his head.

"I couldn't do that," said he. "I ain't a beggar. Granny always said nobody has a right to be a beggar as long as he can work."

Jes stared. What kind of a boy was this he had stumbled upon? An ignorant mountain stripling who refused gifts!

"Well," said Jes, "I'll lend it to you, then."

"But I can't borrow, neither," said Joe. "Granny would make me give the book straight back if she was here."

"Look here, Joe," said Jes. "It's an awful thing not to know how to read. I mean for a boy your size. You've already lost lots of time. It wasn't your fault, but it is your fault now if you don't learn when you have the chance, and you ought to remember that."

"Seems to me," said Joe, "it would be worser—"

"Worse," said Jes.

"Worse to be borrowing when I can't see my way to paying back. No, I must do without it, or else—"

"What?"

"I must work for it. That's the way I always done—"

"Did."

"Did in the mountains. If I wanted anything at the store Mr. Jarvis let me earn it. That's the way I aim to do always."

Jes's eyes showed his surprise; he had never heard of such a thing.

Why, already he had several little accounts of his own at the stores. He generally had one at the book-store, and always one at the confectioner's. It was his own little secret, and he was very careful always to settle them at the end of the month, when he received his allowance. He always took all the money his uncle was willing to give, too. And here was a boy who would neither receive gifts nor borrow. He wondered if, by-and-by, he would not be offering to pay for the clothes he had on. There was no moving a boy like that. Jes was about to give it up in despair.

"Well," said he, "that ends it; you can't work for me."

"Why can't I?" said Joe. "Don't you ever work? Don't you need anything done?"

"No," said Jes. "Never. Morrison does all I need, except blacking my shoes, which uncle requires me to do, because he says it is too much to ask of Morrison, unless I pay him extra out of my own pocket.'

"Well," said Joe, "why can't I black the boots for the book? It would only be for about a week?"

Jes hesitated. "I don't know what uncle would say. He knows I dislike to black my own shoes, and he thinks I am a little disposed to imposing sometimes."

"We'll not tell anybody a word about it," said Joe. "It is just paying a debt. If you'll let me take it so, I will be glad to get the book. If you won't, then it will have to wait."

So it was settled; but Jes could not feel quite comfortable somehow. He knew that his uncle would not allow Joe to black his shoes if he knew of it; yet, looking at it Joe's way it seemed

fair enough. He had already learned that Joe's way was apt to be a fair one.

Still, when they reached the shops and he led Joe around to the small glass enclosure that Mr. White called his office, he slipped the book into his overcoat pocket. Because he felt sure that if any question should arise Joe would make a clean breast of the matter. But Joe saw nothing of Jes's uneasiness; shared nothing of it. He was wholly absorbed in the wonderful things about him. The great room seemed almost a world of itself. There were heaps and heaps of beautiful lumber, some ready planed and polished, some waiting the polishing table. In another room, of which he had merely a glimpse in passing, there were stacks of furniture ready for the market. In another department still they told him was the machinery, the gluing-room, and the varnish shop.

There was so much of it that he was quite bewildered; he began to wonder if he ever should learn to move about with safety, still less to be useful in the wonderful place.

Mr. White seemed to guess something of the boy's feeling, for he said:

"You know how it is done, Joe. By beginning right at the bottom."

"Yes, sir," said Joe. "But could I begin at once—now? I am willing to start at the bottom, sir; but I'm not going to stay there."

Mr. White smiled.

"Hadn't you better wait a while?" said he. "Next week will be time enough to begin."

"If you don't care," said Joe, "I'd rather begin right now. 'Pears like it's what I have been a-thirsting for all my life, Mr. White."

"Very well, then, you shall begin to-day. Jes, go down and send the foreman to me."

When the foreman appeared the master said:

"Mr. Johnson, I have brought you a new hand. I wish you to take this boy and find a place for him. His name is Bentley. Try him a week and then report to me." Joe was led away by the foreman, and Jes went home alone. The boys did not meet again until six o'clock in the evening.

After dinner Mr. White, looking into the library, saw them with heads bowed together over the table busily at work over Joe's lessons. An hour later he looked in again. They were still at work, though Jes sat back waiting for Joe to master his task and begin a new one.

That night, after Jes retired, he saw Joe softly enter the room and stop at his bedside.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "What's up?"

"Nothing," said Joe. "I was trying not to wake you. I am only looking for your shoes."

"Oh," said Jes, "let them be till morning."

"No, I won't," said Joe. "It was a fair bargain, and if you don't want to stand to it, I'll not have the book."

"Go on, go on," said Jes. "Do anything you please. Only you've got to learn to read and write and talk. There!"

"You've got to learn." The words reminded Joe of the first night of his arrival when Jes refused to be sick. He had almost learned to think that whatever Jes willed to do he was pretty sure to have it so.

As Joe was leaving the room with the shoes in his hand Jes turned on his pillow and said:

"Say, I do believe you are a softy."

Joe stopped, his anger was up in an instant.

"You'd better not say that," said he. "I fit a man once, a grown-up man, for saying that."

Jes chuckled.

"Oh, well," said he, "just say 'fought,' then, and we'll let it pass."

The week passed pleasantly—gloriously to Joe. At the close of a Saturday afternoon the foreman tapped at the office door.

"I wish, sir," said he, "that you would just come and take a peep at your new hand."

Mr. White rose at once and followed the foreman to the carpenters' department, where Joe was at work.

Before a long, rough carpenter's table stood Joe, his big striped apron reaching from his chin to the tips of his shoes. Before him lay a broad, white plank, over which he was industriously running a plane. At one end of the table, propped up among the curling yellow shavings,

stood a book. With each trip he made to the end of the table the young carpenter took a peep at the book, and the two men saw his lips moving the while he applied himself to his double task of planing and learning his lesson. Now and then he stopped a moment to brush away the shavings that threatened to cover the page, but not once was his attention given to anything outside the work before him. He had no idea that he was being watched, not even when the master tiptoed forward to look over his shoulder and see what book it was that was dividing his attention. What he read there was—"Goodrich's First Reader."

He turned away quickly, and beckoned the foreman to follow him. The humble patience of the first effort at securing an education appealed to Mr. White more than all Joe's troubles had touched him.

"Does he do his work well?" he asked the foreman.

"Nobody in the place better," was the reply. "He has a natural love for tools, and handles

them with a skill remarkable in a boy of his age. I put him to work in the carpenters' shops after trying him at easy little odds and ends for half a day. It's a pity, sir, he's behind in his education, because that will necessitate his leaving the shops in a short time, I suppose, and he would make a famous hand by-and-by."

That night when the boys were again at work in the library, Mr. White, in his study, heard Joe's voice carefully plodding through Goodrich's first lessons:

"It-is-a-hen. Is-it-a-hen?"

When the lesson ended Jes said:

"You ought to have a copy-book; it is time for you to begin writing." Joe was silent; he knew it was to be the old battle over again that he had fought in regard to the reader. "You might charge it at the book-store," Jes went on. "I know the man, and I could ask him."

"No," said Joe. "It ain't any use to ever tell me that again, Jes. I just won't do it, EVER. But I tell you; I am to have Saturday afternoons off. I can find something to do, I know,

in a big town like this, and make enough to buy what I need. I'll have to wait till Saturday."

"You could learn a lot in that time," said Jes. "It's a week off. Besides, the man won't mind; he'll know uncle will make it good if you don't."

"But I mind," said Joe. "And granny would mind, too, if she knew about it. And I 'most know Mr. White would, too. Besides, something might happen; I might die, or never make any money to pay him; then what would the man think?"

"Well," said Jes, "you are a funny fellow. You've got lots of old woman ways, and foolishness."

Joe colored.

"If you just mean that for me, Jes," said he, "I don't care. But if I thought you was making fun of granny I'd thrash you right thar-there-thar—whar-where you set-sit—"

Jes broke into a peal of laughter.

"I wasn't," said he; "truly, I wouldn't do that. But I do just like to see you fire up for your granny. I wish somebody loved me that

way; enough to fight for me. But you have got some funny notions, Joe."

"Well, they are good ones," said Joe. "I ain't ashamed of 'em. Granny knew what was right, if she was old and feeble, and didn't have any book learning; and I guess her word'll do to live by; and so I sha'n't take your advice to go against it. There!"

"No," said Jes, "don't take anybody's. But I say, Joe, would you mind borrowing my slate and pencil till you make your Saturday fortune? You are welcome to it, and it can't wear out, you know. At least the slate can't. You may give me one of your own pencils any time I need it, if that'll set your mind at rest. Would you object to that?"

"Not a bit of it," said Joe, his good humor restored. "If I break 'em I'll buy you more, honest and fair. Could I begin to-night?"

There was never any putting off about this boy. He meant to conquer in the battle he had begun; and the sooner he began, the shorter the conflict. Long after Jes was asleep Joe sat in

his own room patiently following the copy he had set for him.

Mr. White heard stirring in the room long after midnight, and got up to go and see if either of the boys was sick. Joe's door stood wide open, the gas was burning brightly, and seated at a table sat Joe, busy with slate and pencil.

He was about to go in and send the boy off to bed, when Joe got up and passed noiselessly into Jes's room. A moment later he came back, bringing with him Jes's shoes, which he at once began to polish. When the task was finished, Joe crept wearily to bed, and to sleep.

Mr. White had never been so angry with Jes as he was that night.

"So that is the way he treats an ignorant boy, who doesn't know any better than to be his lackey, is it?" said he, as he returned to his own room. "Imposing on his ignorance and good nature. Well, we will see about that in the morning, sir." Then, as he turned off his light again, his disappointment overcame him.

"Oh, Jes! Jes!" he whispered. "I had

hoped those ugly characteristics were disappearing. Poor boy, poor boy!"

As Joe was hurrying down to the library the next morning, he met Mrs. Mallory in the hall.

"Oh, Joe," said she, "what has the poor child been doing to you that the master is so angry with him?"

"To me?" said Joe; "why, nothing. Jes has been as good as gold to me always."

"Then do go in there and tell him so, for he's giving the poor boy a terrible scolding, and Jes refuses to say a word in explanation."

Not knowing what dreadful thing he might expect, Joe hesitatingly opened the library door and entered. Jes stood moody and sulky before his uncle, who was giving him, indeed, a "terrible scolding." Joe had never seen Mr. White angry before, and it almost frightened him. He had no idea what Jes had done; but he knew that whatever it was, he was equally guilty. He began to fear that he might, after all, be sent back to the mountain. It would

break granny's heart for him to fail; and his uncle, he knew, would never cease to twit him with it.

"Come in, sir," said Mr. White; "I want you. What does it mean, your blacking this young gentleman's shoes? I want to know if he required you, or hired you, or how he persuaded you to play bootblack for him. I told that boy the night you came to this house that you were here on equal social footing with himself; and I shall be disappointed to find you had not the same respect for yourself that I had for you. Now then, sir, go on."

"Oh, sir," said Joe, "Jes has never been anything but goodness to me. He didn't want me to black his shoes; he said you wouldn't like it—"

"Humph!"

"It was all my fault; all my work. I persuaded him to it, and I said we need not tell you."

"You did, eh? You persuaded him to falsehood?"

Joe colored and was silent. It was Jes who replied to the charge.

"No," said he, "he didn't."

"Be quiet, will you!" thundered his uncle. "Go on, Bentley."

"Well, sir," said Joe, "I don't lie. I learned that much in the mountain. It's maybe all I did learn, but I got that much. I needed a book, and I didn't have any money. Jes offered to lend it to me, and I wouldn't take it. I wanted to learn to read, mightily; so much, that I begged him to let me work for the book. Granny always let me at home. We couldn't think of anything else, so I begged Jes to let me black his shoes. I am just a-payin' of my debt; that's all. I am sorry if you think I'd oughtn't, because now I must."

"And if I forbid it?" said the master.

"I hope you won't," said Joe; "but I am right—and I shall do it anyhow."

Mr. White looked from one boy to the other, then said to Jes:

"Why didn't you give him the book, sir?"

"Because he wouldn't have it," said Jes.

"Because," Joe interposed, "I could work for it. I ain't a beggar, and I won't borrow; so I worked."

The lines of displeasure disappeared from Mr. White's face.

"Boy," said he, "I don't know what to say to you. If you had told me what was going on, I might have made it easier for both of you. But now the bargain must be completed, as Joe says. It is only right. And Joe, my boy, you got a good deal more in your mountain home than a strict regard for the truth. Stick to your principles; debt is a halter around a man's neck. I should find it hard to pardon either of you if I found you contracting debts. So, Jes, let us hear no more of that, sir. And Joe, your grandmother's wisdom is a safe motto: 'No man has the right to be a beggar who can work.' Now for breakfast. And hereafter, boys, don't you think you'd best let me into your plans?"

Joe resolved that he would always after that take Mr. White into any plan he might con-

sider. But Jes remembered those unpaid bills at the book-store and the baker's, and was silent.

The next Saturday at noon Mr. White sent for Joe at the office. When he appeared he handed him some bills.

"Joe," he said, "I pay off my employés every Saturday at noon. This is your part for the two weeks' work. I had not intended to pay you wages until you should have learned enough to be really of some use in the shops. But my foreman tells me that your knowledge of tools, and skill in handling them, together with your industry, entitle you to equal wages with the men in that department. Under the circumstances, I can do no less than pay you the same."

Joe looked at the money in his hand and tried to speak; he wanted it; he needed many things that it would buy. Yet had he truly earned it?

"But, sir," said he, "you are boarding me. I did try to work the best I could, because it was like working out my board. But now—"

"Well?"

"Why, I must pay for my keep, sir."

"Not to me," said the master, shortly. "I don't keep a boarding-house."

"I allers—I mean I always did that, Mr. White. Even at my uncle's I had to work for my keep. If you don't let me do it here—"

"Well, what then?"

Joe flushed and choked, but not once did he yield his point.

"If you won't let me pay my way, then I shall quit," said he.

"Quit! Are you crazy?"

"No, sir, but I ain't a beggar; and your own foreman has said I could work same as a man. The boy as can work like a man ain't got any right to be keered for like a baby."

Without another word the master touched his bell.

"Send Lawrence to me," said he to the boy who answered the bell.

"Mr. Lawrence," said he, when a tall, very young man entered the office, "you board, do you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"What do you pay for your board?"

"Two and a half a week, sir; workman's fare; good enough for anybody."

"Very well," said the master. "You may go; send Ellis here."

A moment later another workman, somewhat older, somewhat better dressed, appeared. Evidently he belonged to a department of the establishment a degree beyond young Lawrence.

"You sent for me, sir?" said he.

"Yes. I wish to know at what rate your landlady furnishes you board and lodging."

"Three dollars a week, sir. Best in town."

"Very good. You may go. Now, Joe," said he, when the workman had disappeared, "you understand what the rates are for board in Knoxville; that is, workman's board. I suppose mine is as good as Ellis's, so if it will ease your conscience, you may hand Mrs. Mallory three dollars every Saturday afternoon."

"Yes, sir," said Joe, "it will ease it mightily. And now, sir, may I go?"

The master glanced at the clock. "I know it isn't time for the whistle," said Joe, "but I want to spend that money before the stores are shut up, and I've got to go home first and get Jes."

Mr. White could but wonder what it was Joe was so anxious to purchase besides his school books. He had said so little about money, and had never expressed the slightest desire for it; it was odd to see him so keenly alive to its value all at once.

He found out through Jes that night the great secret of Joe's happiness in his first wages. A letter was written to granny that afternoon; Jes wrote it, and a package was sent in care of the stage to the people at the Rock House; for Joe remembered them all, notwithstanding his hard treatment. It brought such joy to granny that Tom wondered "if that thar gift o' Joe's fetched more pleasure or pain, the way granny ware divided 'twixt laughin' an' cryin'."

He knew which feeling predominated at his

own house, however, when he handed Sylvia the little package which granny had told him Joe sent "along o' her's for Silvy."

"Oh! it's a book," cried Sylvia, when her eager little hands had torn away the wrappings; "it's a book with picture, too. Oh, but ain't I glad Aunt Jane showed me how to read. God bless you, Joe Bentley, for my book."

The next letter Joe sent was to Jube, and he wrote it himself.

"It's the first letter I ever tried to write," said he, "and Jes has been teaching me how to do it for a long time. Jes is the boy I got to write my last letter, and he's mighty good to me, and I'm remembering all you told me, and some day I am coming back to the mountain to see you."

A promise the old mountaineer laid up in his heart. Like Sylvia, he, too, had all faith in Joe's promises.

CHAPTER XV

PROGRESS—CHANGES

THE years passed swiftly and pleasantly to Joe. Acting upon Mr. White's advice, he had carefully laid by a part of his wages each year, thus enabling him to pay his own way through school. Each vacation found him back at the shops, busy as he could be, and throughout the school terms he never failed to show up at the manufactory on Saturday mornings among the very first. Every step he made was onward, upward. With Jes, however, the years had not dealt so kindly. That fatal little habit of contracting debts, unknown to his uncle, had grown upon Jes. Once the accounts had been sent to Mr. White, who had paid them, and had given Jes such a lecture that for some time the offense was not repeated. But at length poor Jes's love of indulgence got the better of him, and soon

the accounts were running again as steadily as ever.

To Jes, Joe was still a wonder. "I never saw such a boy," he would declare. "You do nothing but work, work, work all the time. I wish I could do something, too."

"Why, you can," Joe replied, "and you must."

And then Jes would fall to wondering if it might not have been Joe's hard beginning that had taught him self-restraint and perseverance.

"You don't have temptations," he would say. "You got your start in life before the love of luxuries had a chance to spoil you. Sometimes I wish I had."

And watching Jes's struggle day by day, almost hour by hour, Joe sometimes felt almost glad, too, that his first years had not been years of ease and indulgence.

One afternoon, when Joe had been a member of Mr. White's household for about six years, he met Jes going up to his room in a very slow, solemn manner, that at once struck Joe meant

something wrong. His first thought was that Jes was in some trouble about his indebtedness, and he at once followed him to ascertain if it might be the cause of his unhappiness.

Jes met him at the door, and drawing him into his room, said:

"It is all up this time, Joe. I am in for it. You know what uncle said."

"See here, Jes," said Joe, "you surely have not been running up bills again after that last scolding?"

"Yes, I have. You can't know what a hold they get on one; you can't appreciate it because you have never been in debt."

"No," said Joe, "I haven't. But I can appreciate the utter folly and uselessness of your doing so. You must go straight to your uncle and ask forgiveness."

"I'll go straight out of this house and never enter the door again before I'll do any such thing," was the reply. "In fact I thought of doing that anyhow."

"Oh, Jes, don't be an ingrate as well as a

spendthrift," said Joe. "How much is it this time, and who are the parties?"

"The same old story: books and sweets," said Jes, drawing from his pocket two long accounts, which he handed to Joe. "You see, they threaten me with uncle, too."

Joe glanced at the amount of the bills and drew a long breath. "Fifty dollars! Why, how on earth did it run up so?"

"Well, you see I didn't settle the last two quarters. I had other things that were more pressing, I thought. And now, well, you see I just can't. And I only have a week in which to settle, or the accounts will go to uncle. That is, the confectioner's will. The book-house is a trifle more decent."

"See here, Jes," said Joe, "you are in a bad way, I can tell you. There is but one thing to do; go at once to Mr. White with it. But you must do it; these men must not be permitted to tell him."

"Well, I say I won't," said Jes; "I'll run away first. You know how he feels about debt."

"And I can fancy how he would feel about runaways," remarked Joe.

Jes turned upon his heel, with a scowl.

"Well," said he, "you needn't preach, that's all."

Joe wasted no more words, but all the afternoon he was busy trying to devise some means of helping Jes out of his trouble. About sunset he went up to his room, and, finding the door slightly ajar, entered without knocking. Jes was half inside a closet, from which he was dragging a stout valise, and did not hear Joe enter. When he spoke, the valise fell back into the closet and Jes hurriedly closed the door upon it.

"See here," said he, "it isn't exactly polite to be sneaking into a fellow's room without knocking."

"I don't sneak," said Joe, quietly, "and I have come to try to help you. Mr. White will be here in half an hour. Come Jes, get your courage up to the point of braving the worst, and make a clean breast of it. He will be

angry, perhaps, but more hurt than angry; and he will forgive you, too, and help you, not only to get straight, but to keep straight. Come, say you will."

Jes laid his hand upon an inkstand on the table near by.

"If you don't get out of this room," said he, "I'll throw this bottle at your head."

"And when you do," said Joe, "I shall lay you across my knee and paddle you like a baby."

Jes was too angry to speak, but something in the face of the strong, robust young fellow before him warned him that Joe meant precisely what he said. So, instead of throwing the bottle, he turned and threw himself across the bed, with his face buried among the pillows.

Joe talked on, quietly, without noticing the hint that Jes might be tired of his company.

"Now, Jes," said he, "you are welcome to my money; I haven't much, because Mr. White put it into some stock for me yesterday. But it might stay off things."

Jes bounded to his feet and confronted his would-be helper.

"Don't you dare," said he, "to offer me your money. Do you suppose I have forgotten that when you came here, a mere stripling, that you refused to borrow twenty-five cents from me? Do you think a boy of eighteen has less pride than a boy of twelve had?"

"I remember," said Joe, still retaining his quiet voice and manner, "that the boy of twelve might have gone on groveling in ignorance a long time but for that same twenty-five cents. And you remember what I told you, that granny said there always comes a time when we can return kindnesses. It is my turn now, Jes."

Over the face of the angry boy swept a change; he had had time for the sober second thought which poor Jes could always depend upon.

A sob came in his throat, almost choking speech. He held out his hand, which Joe silently clasped.

"Forgive me, Joe," said he. "I didn't intend to be mean, but, indeed, I am in a great strait. I couldn't take your money, though I thank you just as much. I have always made it a matter of conscience that I would not drag you into my troubles and blunders. And, really, your example regarding that twenty-five cents has helped me to stick to this resolution. I shall get on somehow, I dare say; don't you worry. There! there is the bell; uncle has come. Remember, Joe, not a word. Not a word to uncle."

Reluctantly Joe promised, but at the same time he reserved to himself the right of going down early in the morning and arranging Jes' matters, offering himself as security until the end of another quarter. Meanwhile, however, Jes had made some plans for himself, which, if successful, would effectually balk Joe's plans for his relief.

He was quiet and thoughtful at dinner, and soon after, pleading indisposition, he went up to his room. There he counted over the money

that remained of his last quarter's allowance—nine dollars.

"It will not go very far," said he, "but it will go some—"

And then dragging the big valise out of the closet, he began packing it. Jes had determined to run away.

"It is not," he told himself, "as though I could confess it to uncle and be clear of it. It will never leave me; I have tried all my life, pretty well, to conquer the habit, and I can't. It grows, and will only bring more and more trouble to uncle as I get older. I'd best end it now."

Meanwhile Joe and Mr. White sat below in the study, talking over matters connected with the manufactory.

They often sat thus together evenings when Jes was busy with his practicing, or reading in his room.

After a while there was a lull in the conversation, and Joe heard the master breathe a deep sigh. Instantly he saw Joe's eye fixed upon him, and said:

"Joe, I wish I could feel right comfortable about Jes. He is a good fellow at heart, but somehow I am always afraid for him. If he only knew the sleepless hours I have spent for him, poor boy!"

"Hadn't you better let him know, sir?" said Joe.

"No; Jes must feel that I trust him. That is his only safety. But I have felt the responsibility of him sometimes almost too much for me."

He dropped his face into his hand in a dejected way that went to Joe's heart. He felt glad that he didn't have the trouble of Jes's new disobedience at that moment to add to his grief. He had never understood till now what a care a boy might be, and he felt anxious lest he, too, had been a responsibility, carrying with it more pain than pleasure. He thought Jes ought to know, however. He was warm and loyal-hearted, and he felt that if he once could feel the anxiety that was oppressing his uncle it would have great weight with him.

"I hope, sir," said Joe, "that I, too, have not caused you anxiety; if at any time I do I shall consider it a kindness if you will plainly point out to me—"

"Stop, Joe," said the manufacturer. "You have been nothing but a joy and a comfort to me since you first set foot in my house. Remember that always. There has never been an hour that I have not had reason to rejoice to find you here. You have repaid a hundred times over the interest I felt for you, both by your appreciation and your endeavors to profit by your opportunities. Never think of such a thing as my worrying about you. I rejoice in you always."

He rose as he spoke and held out his hand.

"I am going to bed now; good-night my boy, and God bless you."

After he went out Joe went into the library and wrote a long letter to Jube. Jube was almost his only correspondent now, excepting an occasional letter from Tom. Tom never wrote long letters, however, and they were very,

very few at that. Jube's last letter told him of a visit he had made to the Rock House to see granny. She wasn't very well, the letter said, and would talk of nothing but Joe's last little visit to her. He had only been there for a day; indeed, once every year he had run up for a day or two to see granny, but he never remained long, and never went anywhere else. All the little time he had to spare he preferred to give to her.

His uncle, Jube wrote, was down with the "rheumatiz, sufferin' mightily, an' crosser'n a sick bear."

In his reply, Joe inclosed a bill, and asked the storekeeper to see that his grandmother and his uncle had everything necessary to their comfort. Then, his letter finished, he turned off the gas below stairs preparatory to going up to his own room.

But the moon shone so brightly that he stopped a moment in the hall to watch through the frosted door glass the brightness outside. He had stood thus for about ten minutes when

he heard a soft, stealthy footstep coming carefully down the stairs. His first thought was that thieves had gotten into the house, and had probably been in Mr. White's room.

He was unarmed, but he would take the midnight prowler at a disadvantage, and that was something. And he knew that unless the man should get an opportunity of shooting him, that he could hold him until he could alarm the house and get assistance. He drew noiselessly back into the shadow, waiting and listening. The muffled footsteps drew nearer. The thief was coming that way. Instantly Joe was seized with a terrible fear of that which might already have happened to his benefactor. Perhaps he had been murdered, or dangerously hurt. So terrible was his anxiety that he was about to give the alarm and call up the house, regardless of consequences, when he saw a slight, slim figure, wearing a boyish cap upon its small, round head, and carrying a heavy valise in one hand, slowly and noiselessly make the last turn in the stairs; in another moment Jes stepped into the

moonlight that fell through the door glass. The light was dimmed by the heavy plate frosting, so that the face was not plainly visible, but Joe recognized Jes's familiar figure at once. He heard him feeling with his free hand along the door facing for the key, then a low, careful creaking as the door opened, before he recovered from his surprise sufficiently to act.

He sprang out from his concealment and caught the runaway lightly, but securely, by the arm.

"Come back!" he commanded. "Stop! You shall not do this ungracious thing, Jesse White."

"Let go of my arm," murmured Jes. "Let go before I strike you; do you hear?"

"No," said Joe, "I never will let you go to your ruin if I can prevent it. Come back at once; with all your faults don't add to them the unpardonable one of ingratitude."

The door had swung slightly ajar, and in the moonlight Joe saw the anger in Jes's eyes. Still he held to his arm. He knew that if he could detain him long enough for him to think a

second time of what he was doing, that Jes was safe. And he knew that once he should run away, he would not be shameless enough to return; for Jes was not lacking in pride, though pitifully wanting in discretion.

The two stood facing each other an instant, then the hand gripping the valise slowly opened and Jes lifted his fist.

"Let me go—you—"

Joe caught the descending blow full in his face.

"Don't call me names," said he, blind with the pain; "you will be sorry to-morrow. But I shall not let you go; not if you kill me where I stand. I love you too well to ever let you go while there's life in my body. Now, unless you come straight back, I shall hold you here and alarm the house. Do you understand? Once, twice—"

Jes hesitated; something stirred in his heart that was plainly visible in his face. Joe hastened to take advantage of the feeling.

"My poor Jes," said he, "come back, and let

us figure out a way together. Come back, and let your brother help you."

Slowly the fingers clasping the door-knob relaxed, and the hand fell at Jes's side. Joe reached out and noiselessly closed and bolted the door; then, picking up the valise in one hand, he threw his arm around Jes and led him, sobbing like a child, back to his own safe, cosy room. They had reached the foot of the stairway, when Mr. White called from the landing above:

"Hello! what's up? What's the matter down there? Who is it that is up so late?"

"It is I, sir," said Joe. "I sat up to write a letter."

"Too late, Joe; too late," said the master. "You'll feel it to-morrow."

And then he went back to bed, leaving the way clear for Jes to get into his room unobserved.

They had a long talk together, sitting there in the moonlight on Jes's bed, but there was so little to be done that Joe was almost in despair.

"I can only let them present the accounts to uncle," said Jes. "And I tell you now, Joe, I will not answer for the consequences."

Joe argued and suggested, but nothing that he could suggest seemed to satisfy Jes.

"It isn't as though it were the first time," said he. "And it isn't as though it would be the last. I tell you, I can't cure the habit; it's got me."

"No," said Joe, "we can never cure ourselves, Jes. There is but one physician for diseases like yours."

"You mean—?"

"God; yes."

"And what would God care about the silly debts of a silly young fellow like me, do you suppose?"

"Nothing that is large enough to trouble one of His children is too small for God's interest," said Joe. "I read that somewhere, I don't know where, but I know it is true. And it is just as true that He'll help us when we call upon Him. Now, were I you—"

"Well," said Jes, "what would you do in my place?"

Joe shook his head.

"You will never do as I should, Jes."

Jes laid his hand upon Joe's.

"Try me," said he.

"Well, then, were I in the trouble that you are in, if I could not make up my mind to ask the advice of my uncle, I should go to those men and ask them to allow me to work out my debts. I should explain the situation fully. If there is a spark of genuine manhood in them, and it is possible for them to do so, they will not refuse you. It is the beginning of vacation, you have nothing to do; and believe me, Jes, nothing but a genuine hard lesson like this will do the least good toward breaking you of the habit of indulgence which leads you into debt, and thereby into trouble. After it is all arranged, too late to undo, I would go to my uncle and tell him what I had done. He is too noble, and too keenly alive to any earnest effort on

your part to do otherwise than commend your course."

"Do you know," said Jes, "that you are advising me to become a baker's boy?"

"That is the only honorable way out of it, Jes," said Joe. "A baker's boy is as good as a banker's, if he is honest and upright."

Jes was silent; it seemed a very wild scheme, and he wondered if his uncle would allow it. Then he realized that Joe was right; it was the only manly thing he could do under the circumstances. He rose and held out his hand.

"I'll do it," said he. "It seemed awfully silly at first, then it seemed preposterous, and then, somehow, it seemed all right. I'll do it. Good-night, now; I think I can sleep some."

Joe had risen, too.

"Good-night," said he. "A thing resolved upon is half done, Jes."

Early the next morning Jes went down to attend to his unpleasant business. He went alone; Joe offered to accompany him, but he declined his company.

"Too much like dragging you into it, Bentley," said he. "Besides, I'm not baby enough to really need anybody."

He went first to the book-store; somehow he felt less afraid of facing the head of that establishment than he felt in offering himself to the dusty old baker who owned the confectionery adjoining the bakery. He followed Joe's advice strictly and concealed nothing, admitting that his uncle had forbidden his running into debt, and that he preferred to work out his indebtedness rather than ask his uncle to settle it, or to tell him of his disobedience until he could see his way out of it.

The old bookseller looked at him over his spectacles. There was that about the boy's confession, and that in his regard for the good opinion of his benefactor, that appealed to the old man's generosity.

"How old are you," he asked.

"Eighteen, sir; though I am aware that I look much younger. I have never been very strong, you see."

"And therefore spoiled," said the bookseller. "Well, young man, I am disposed to help you, since you are disposed to help yourself. One of my clerks starts to-day on his vacation; he will be gone a month. His salary is seventy-five dollars. He is an old and experienced hand. You are young and inexperienced; if you choose to take the place for four weeks at one-third his salary, you may go to work this afternoon."

Jes was so elated over this success that he almost forgot to be afraid of the baker. Here he didn't find such easy settlement; the old baker wanted his money.

"I go to der uncle," said he. "He pay de bills I prings to him. I haf but to say 'der young man impose on my shenerosity.'"

Jes was so angry that he turned away with a defiant threat to meet the baker's threat; as it happened this was precisely the thing needed. "Take it to him," said he. "Take it to him, and see how much more of his patronage you will get. He told me last month that if another

bill of mine was sent him from this house he would give you notice never to put either his or my name on your books again; there! Go to him if you wish."

The baker knew a thing or two. He had no wish to endanger his own interest, and the manufacturer's accounts were always settled promptly every Saturday night; they were not small accounts, either, as the baker knew. He called to Jes as he was leaving the house:

"Vait; vait a minute, young shentleman. Ven did you say you could come?"

"In one month precisely."

"Vell, den, let it be for a mont; den you coom back, an' talk to me mit it again. I eggspect we make a goot trade."

"Thank you, sir," said Jes. "I trust we may."

Then came the hardest task of all. Jes was closeted that night with his uncle for two hours. Joe never asked and never knew what happened. He felt that Jes was making a clean breast of it, however. And when at last he saw

the study door open, and the old man stand a moment with his hand upon Jes's head, he felt that it was laid there in benediction, and that hereafter poor Jes would not have such a single-handed battle with his frailties.

The new work began at once; the summer proved a long and hard one to the boy earning his first wages.

True, the work at the book-store was not so unpleasant; the head of the establishment was kind, and Jes did his best. Still, he was a new hand and the work came awkward at first.

And then followed those long hot days at the bakery. The best position he could get was that of delivery boy. Even Joe's brown face flushed with indignation when Jes related at night his first day's experience. Joe suggested to him not to remain; such work as this was not expected of him. But Jes was as stubbornly determined to go on as he had been to shirk his obligation. Day in, day out, the long drives over the hot streets went on. Delivering bread; there was not much poetry in it, and Jes forgot

to think it might be heroic. He forgot everything but that he was doing his duty. One day when he was feeling hotter, and more weary than usual, he rang the bell of his uncle's kitchen to deliver the loaves to the housekeeper. Mrs. Mallory opened the door to him, and seeing him standing there with his long white apron, and his arms full of bread, she exclaimed: "You're a brave boy, Jesse, and will make a man of yourself, I'm thinking."

After that the day seemed less hard to get through with. The little word of encouragement had served to give him new courage.

At last it ended; with the very last week of summer Jes's contract for paying his debts was concluded.

One evening he came home with a new lightness in his step; he hurried past the library up to his own room, where he made a fresh, careful toilet. He was the old Jes of a few months back. The old Jes? No, not quite ever the same. The boy that came out from the baker's shop had brought with him an energy, and a

soul for work, which the old light-hearted Jes of the previous months had not known.

Mr. White and Joe were waiting for him in the library. Mr. White had been anxious to send Jes to college this fall, but had not been able to get him to talk about it. He had been speaking to Joe on the subject when Jes presented himself in the library.

"Well, gentlemen," said he, with the familiar glad ring in his voice again, "I am once more square with the world. And again I can hold up my head."

Mr. White held out his hand.

"You have fought a hard fight, my boy, and you have learned a lesson," said he. "Always remember that debt is a destroyer of one's self-respect, and I shall not regret your late unpleasant experience."

"I shall not forget it," said Jes. "And I shall not forget the baker's shop, either. Now, uncle, I am ready to talk about college. I am done with play, and I wish to get into my place in the world of workers. I have found that which

Joe here learned at the outset: what a serious thing life is. In short, my season in the baker's shop has made—a—man—of—me."

And the "man" was so overcome by emotion that had not the summons to dinner come at that moment he would have been guilty of very womanly tears. Two weeks later Jes left for college.

Then it was that the manufacturer discovered what a comfort and stay he had in Joe. They were constant companions; every evening found them together in the library, talking over the events of the day, arranging for the morrow, and becoming every hour more dear to each other. Often throughout the day they would be closeted together in the office, untangling some matter of business, or else making new contracts, conferring upon the merits of some new invention, doing those endless little things necessary to the success of a large establishment.

Sometimes the master would be absent for weeks, leaving the business entirely to Joe.

"He understands it as well as I," he would

say to his foreman at leaving. "As well and better, since he is a practical workman. Go to him as freely as you would come to me for instructions."

The year passed quietly, with few changes to stir the interest, until one day a letter came from Jes that created more than ordinary excitement. Jes, little, mischievous, happy-hearted, fun-loving Jes, was going to enter the ministry. He had written to ask his uncle's permission. Mr. White shed happy tears as he held Jes's letter in his hand and talked it over with Joe in the library the night it came.

"I can die now," said he; "I can die content, knowing that both my boys are safe. Ah, Joe, if you knew how I have wrestled with God over that boy, praying for the triumph of the good that is in him over the weak! And it has triumphed! This is the very thing for him. The boy is a born missionary, only he was never serious enough to find it out until lately."

"Yes," said Joe, trying to smile and brush-

ing off a tear, "he is a 'born missionary;' I ought to know, since I was the first heathen that ever fell to his charge. He taught me how to read."

It was a happy home-coming when at the end of the term Jes got back to them. Only for a little while had he come, however. His place in the world was waiting, and Jes was anxious to get into it.

He had changed greatly in the year that he had been gone; he was stouter, graver, more manly, and, if possible, more devotedly fond of Joe than he had ever been.

One night when the two sat alone after dinner waiting for Mr. White, who had returned to the office at the manufactory for some papers that he had left there, they talked over their experiences of the past and their prospects for the future.

"You see," said Jes, "I can't help feeling, Joe, that you and I have acted somehow as foils to each other. Surely two boys more unlike were never thrown together; sometimes, look-

ing at it, it seems to me that it was a risk. Another way, it seems all right. It proved to be all right, to be sure; yet I rather think it was your simple beginning in the mountains, together with the hard old truths and splendid examples of the two you never have grown weary of quoting, 'granny' and 'Jube,' that helped us both along. We might, you know, have imbibed the weak that was in each other's characters."

"You forget," said Joe, "to put Mr. White into your calculations. Remember the beautiful example, the wise head, and the warm sympathy that have surrounded and followed us both all these happy years, Jes."

"I do remember," said Jes. "I remember and love him always. Yet it is to you that I owe the important. turn, the critical decision that really shaped my destiny. It was you who sent me into the ministry, Joe. And to me it has brought a beautiful lesson; the good that God sends into our lives He expects us to pass on to another less fortunate. My grandmother

rescued my uncle; he passed the blessing on to you; you have handed it back to me. God's help is a loan rather than a gift. We use it and pass it on, as my uncle did, and as you have done."

"What! I?"

"Yes; I couldn't forget that baker's boy. So few people gave me a good word, or even a kind look, that summer. They did not know who I was, and did not think it necessary to be polite to a mere delivery boy. But it taught me what a varied thing life is; and how many have to struggle through it without ever a good word or a lift along the way. I think I determined, really, then to give my life to saying these good words. I found where I was needed. Then, too, that ugly experience showed me where I was drifting, and it frightened me. If I had run away that night, as I tried to do, I would have been lost. I know that. I hope our lives may always touch in some way, Joe. You've been the prop to my weak boyhood. I tell you so, frankly."

"Honors are easy," said Joe. "You taught

me to read. Do you remember the night I learned that 'It—is—a—hen?'"

They both laughed, and the talk turned to lighter things.

At last Joe remembered that it was time for Mr. White to come back.

"I think," said he, "that I shall meet him and walk back with him. He hasn't felt so well lately; complained of swimming in his head. You needn't sit up, Jes, unless you prefer."

"I think I shall," said Jes. "I haven't long to be with him, and I am eager not to lose one moment of the time."

Joe smiled, and turned, his hat in his hand, to say:

"When he got your letter he said, 'I am ready to die now; both my boys are safe.'"

"Thank God he can feel so," said Jes, fervently. "And I thank you for telling me, Joe."

As Joe hurried down to the office, his uneasiness increased. He censured himself severely for allowing Mr. White to go alone, at night, to the works. True, the watchman was there, but

in another part of the building, and engaged in his own work.

He felt relieved when, passing along the street, he peeped through a chink in the window-blinds and saw the figure of Mr. White sitting quietly at his desk.

"He has been busy and has forgotten to watch the time," Joe told himself. A moment later he opened the door and went in, whistling as he went, in order not to startle his employer.

As he approached the glass enclosure he could get a better view of the desk than that afforded through the chink in the shutters. Suddenly it struck him there was something unusual in the position of the body occupying the chair at the desk. The head drooped forward in a weary way, and, though the eyes were opened, Joe saw that Mr. White was not looking at anything.

With a cry of alarm, he threw back the door and entered the private enclosure, calling as he went. There was no reply, but on the pavement outside he heard footsteps, and knew that the night watchman had heard his call.

Fearing the worst, Joe seized the hand lying upon the desk; it was warm. "Thank God!" said he, "there is life." He drew the beloved head to his bosom and looked down into the beautiful old face that had borne so much of heaven's goodness in its familiar features.

The forehead was moist and cold; the eyes were staring and sightless. "Oh! my poor, poor friend," said Joe. "To think you were here alone at night, and suffering."

He placed him gently upon the floor and ran to the door to summon aid.

"Help!" he cried to the watchman coming down the sidewalk. "Help! This way."

A policeman passing at the next corner heard the cry and came running also.

"Get a doctor, quick!" cried Joe. "Mr. White has had a stroke of paralysis."

When the doctor arrived Joe sent a messenger on to prepare Jes and Mrs. Mallory, so that when they reached home the house was ready to receive its stricken master.

It was hopeless from the first, the physician

had said, so that none of the watchers left his bedside all the long night. Jes and Joe watched eagerly for any sign of recognition that he might make before the end came; but he never knew them again. It was as though he had indeed only been waiting until he should know that "both his boys were safe" before leaving them.

At dawn the gentle, sympathetic spirit passed away.

When the will was read it was found that he had left his fortune to Jes. All except the house and the shops. These he bequeathed to Joe. "Jes's work will call him elsewhere," the will read, "but Joe will follow in my footsteps. And I am sure I can trust him to take care of Mrs. Mallory."

There were little gifts to the servants, a donation to his faithful old housekeeper, and certain remembrances to some of his workmen who had served him long and faithfully. The life that had been so helpful to others seemed to be carrying on its good works, even beyond, and after it had passed away.

CHAPTER XVI

AFTER MANY DAYS

ANOTHER year had passed; Joe began to feel settled in his new position as master of the big shops. Jes was entering upon his first charge, so that he didn't write very often of late, and Joe began to think more and more of the friends he had left upon the mountain. They were not so many now; his uncle had died during the year, and so, too, had granny. She had lived long enough to see her boy safely started upon the life road, and then one quiet day in summer the old hands laid by their work, and granny went home. Under the moaning old hemlock on the mountain top they laid her away to sleep.

Others were missing, too, from the old scenes of his childhood. One day a letter had come from Tom Tate saying that Sylvia was ill again.

Her old enemy, the rheumatism, had appeared again, and "poor Silvy air failin' fast," said the letter.

Then Joe did something that he had wished many times in his stinted and unhappy boyhood that he was able to do; he sent Tom the money to carry himself and Sylvia to Florida.

And there, in the beautiful land of flowers, under the warm skies, and in sight of the gentle waters of the Indian River, Tom had buried her. She would sleep as well, Joe knew, with the birds to sing for her the winter long, and the golden oranges shining through their satiny leaves, as though among the shadows of the grim old mountains. Yet he felt sorry that she was not there; somehow he fancied the old mountain must love the little dust of her that was so closely associated with its glooms and its gladness. When she died Tom wrote again to give him Sylvia's last message:

"Tell Joe good-bye, and I sha'n't forget him."

Joe sighed for the little child friend of those

first unhappy days, and felt glad that she had remembered him so fondly at the last. There is always a sacred regard for a message from one crossing into the unknown. It is a presence that follows one through all after life. Joe was not sorry to think the love in a little child's heart might perhaps have been carried across the unknown. News still came from the mountain, however. Jube wrote; not often, for Jube found letter-writing a difficult pastime. He was growing old, the letters said; and he had suffered misfortunes of late. His house had been burned; his wife had died; many of his old friends moved away. He was living alone, in the store, doing his own cooking, and sleeping nights in the room over the store where in the old days the peltry had hung from the rafters.

The last letter from him came in October; the tenth October since the raiding of the illicit still under the Rainbow Falls.

Joe was sitting in his office when the letter was handed him, just before the hour of closing up. He read it before going home. At the very

bottom of the page there was a postscript; he had been very near overlooking it:

"I have lost," said the postscript, "another dear friend."

That was all; and written in the crooked, cramped hand of an uneducated old man, away up among the mountains of Eastern Tennessee. But as he read the simple message, something slipped along Joe's cheek and fell, unchecked, upon the page. The young master knew well the royal heart beating in the bosom of the rough old mountaineer. He tossed the letter into his desk, locked it, and rang for the foreman.

When the man appeared, Joe was getting into his overcoat.

"I am going away for a few days," said he, "and I leave you in charge until I return."

"Any address, Mr. Bentley?" said the foreman. "Any address, in case of accidents?"

"No," said Joe. "I shall be off the railroad where a message could not reach me. I am going up into the timber country, where Mr. White used to buy."

Once again the maple leaves were drifting; a purple haze rested upon the hills; there was a gurgle of water among the laurel brakes; nuts were falling.

The settlement store was something the worse for wear. The weather had beaten it gray, the sun warped the clapboards of the roof. The doorstep upon which the moonshiner's son had sat one desolate day in September, holding the bridle of a gray mule, had twice succumbed to the pressure of heavy calf-skin boots, and had been twice replaced by the old storekeeper. Now it was ready to tumble down again, and the storekeeper seemed not to notice it, until the few old neighbors remaining began to say of him, "Jube's ageing some."

Still he did not, as some advised, "stir himself to find another step." He was getting careless since his wife left him; nothing to work for, he told himself; and sometimes spoke of selling out to a man over in an adjoining county who was anxious to buy the store. The visitors to the settlement often found the

door closed, for old Jube had fallen into a habit of walking out alone into the forest, communing with nature in the vastness of her solitudes. During these rambles he often thought of the boy he had tried, in his gruff way, to help over the rough places in the life road. Always, when he had heard from him, he was climbing —climbing. And always after a letter from the boy he would hurry over to the old barn and throw down an extra feed to a dilapidated old gray mule that he called "Kitty," and that had been cosseted and spoiled into a lazy old age, that was still enjoying itself at a generous corn-crib. Sometimes he patted the mule's back and said:

"Jest us two left, Kitty; we ought to be good to one 'nother."

It was late one morning in October, when he was returning to the store from one of his lonely walks, that he fell to thinking of the mule's former master. The old store seemed more gloomy than usual this morning; it was near noon when he put the key at last into the lock.

Visitors coming early in the day had declared that Jube was "gittin' triflin'." But the storekeeper was smiling as he went back to the fireplace and lighted his pipe. He was thinking of the last letter he had written Joe.

"Maybe," said he, "I'd ought to a-told who that thar 'dear friend' ware who died. I could a-told. I useter tell the chap a good many things when he was here. I told a lie for him onct. I don't know to this good day if I done right or no. He was jest a boy, no mammy, worse than no daddy, an' I aimed to do what looked to me best. But, somehows, I have allers hated that thar lie."

There was a rattle of wheels running lightly along the sandy road. The storekeeper knew without looking up that the easy-running vehicle did not belong to the mountain. As he rose to go to the door, a light carriage, drawn by two handsome bays, drew up and stopped. A young man leaped to the ground, tossed the lines aside, and ran into the store.

His step was a little unsteady as he mounted

the half-rotted old doorstep, and his eyes were shining and soft as he looked about the lines of shelves, half-emptied of their varied treasures, the peppers and the tin cups hanging side by side; the big boxes and barrels, and among them, slowly rising to meet him, the old storekeeper himself.

"Mornin', stranger," said the merchant, in his familiar way.

Did the young eyes twinkle? Or was it a mist that obscured the stranger's vision for the moment, as he answered, cheerily:

"Good-morning. I wish to see Mr. Juba Jarvis."

"Well, stranger, you ain't got to go any further for that," said the old man. "What can I do for you, now?"

Surely the young eyes did twinkle, as their owner stepped forward and, without warning, clasped an arm about the old merchant's neck.

"Oh, Mr. Jarvis! don't you know me? Don't you remember Joe, the moonshiner's son?"

The storekeeper gasped, stared, and dropped back into his chair again.

"If it ain't—little Joe Bentley—I'll—be—blowed!" said he. "Stan' back thar, Joe; stan' back; you've sort o' knocked the wind—out—o' me."

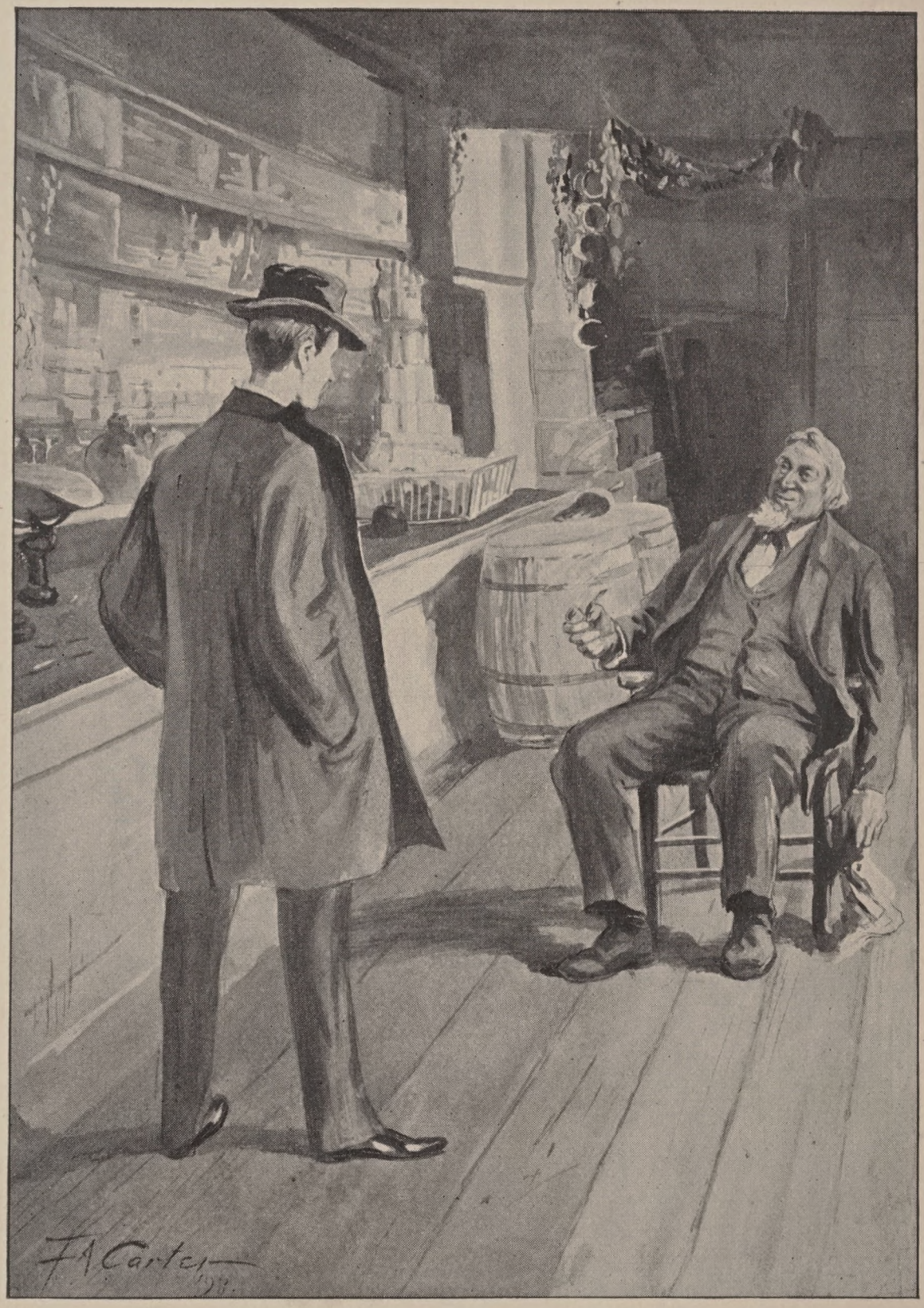
He fidgeted nervously a moment, tapped the bowl of his pipe upon the hearth, blew his nose with all his might, and drew the back of his hand suspiciously across his eyes, while Joe stood by and laughed. Then said he again:

"Stan' back thar, son; stan' back, an' let me git a good look at you. My! My! But I'm glad to see you, Joe."

Laughing like a boy again, Joe stood back for inspection. When it was over they shook hands again, took seats and began to talk.

"What fetched you, son? What fetched you back to the mount'n?" said the storekeeper, thinking, with a chuckle, of the last letter he had written.

"Well," said Joe, "that 'friend' you had die, for one thing."



"LET ME GIT A GOOD LOOK AT YOU"
(Page 328)

"Yes," said Jube, "it's a trifle lonesome since old Kit was took."

"Who?"

"Why, ole Kit, son; surely you haven't forgot ole Kit, your 'pardner,' Joe?"

"Oh, Mr. Jarvis!" said Joe; "is it possible you have kept the old mule all these years for my sake?"

"She died week 'fore last," was the reply. "A 'dear friend,' as I writ you. What else fetched you, Joe?"

"What else? Why, I came on a little business."

"Special?"

"Yes; very special. I have come to take you off home with me."

The storekeeper fairly bounded from his seat.

"To fetch me away from the mount'n! Why, I couldn't live off'n the mount'n, Joe."

"Yes, you could, too," said Joe. "And you've got to go. I just can't feel satisfied to know you're up here all alone, in your old age.

There's no sense in it; your home is gone, and your wife; and I want you; I need you."

The old man blew his nose lustily.

"Son," said he, "the most I ware hopin' for was to hear you say you'd come to see me, special. Why, son—"

He stopped, choked; somehow the coming of this boy, who had left him a mere stripling, ignorant of all things save hardship, and had come back full of success and with the young heart of him unchanged, filled with the simple, boyish affection and gratitude it had carried out into the world, touched him, and speech was choked by tears.

His coming had awakened tender memories, too, in the breast of the old mountaineer.

"Yes," said he, after a long pause, "I miss Sary mightily, I ain't denyin' o' that. An' I miss the old house, too. My grandad built that house, and it never sheltered a rascal yit, as I knows on. I miss it mightily every time I look across the road. An' I miss the horn a-blowin' fur dinner whenever I git ter slicin' a

strip o' bacon to brile fur my lonesome meals. I even missed old Kit. But Lor', I reckon I'd miss the mount'n more'n all the balance. Leave the mount'n! I couldn' think of it, son."

"Yes, you can," said Joe. "I've come for you, and I'm not going away without you. I intend to tuck you into that trap and carry you down the mountain this night."

"But the store, Joe; think o' the store."

"Rent it," said Joe. "Or sell it; give it away! I don't care what. I've got enough for you, I reckon. You don't need a blessed thing in here; and I don't want a blessed thing in here but you. Come, Mr. Jarvis, time to be stirring."

"But, Joe—"

"Now, Mr. Jarvis, don't," said Joe. "I want to do it. You did so much for me; let me pay my debt. I want to take care of you the rest of your life."

"P'sher! I didn't do nothin'; nothin at all."

"You did, though," Joe insisted, "and I mean to take you home with me. I've a nice home, and Mrs. Mallory is my housekeeper. You

needn't idle, either; you shall oversee one of the departments of the manufactory, if you like. You must come. Is the store the only difficulty?"

"N—o—" said Jube, "thar's a man in the 'j'inin' county would buy the store—"

"Send for him at once," cried Joe; "there's my team at the door. We'll finish up the business and be off for home by the time the moon rises over old Pine Knot Mountain."

The storekeeper laughed nervously.

"Don't be too brash, son; I ain't said I'd go yit. If I was to die—I'd like to sleep 'long o' Sary—"

"You shall," said Joe. "I promise you faithfully I'll bring you back and bury you on the mountain."

"That'd be more homeful like. But—"

"Well! What now?"

"It ain't any fun takin' a old man up by the roots, so to speak, an' puttin' of him into new soil. A tree wouldn't stan' it; an' I've noticed as men an' trees ain't so mighty unlike. Can't transplant 'em mighty well when they're old.

But I ain't forgetful that you wanted me to go, son. I'm jest too old, too old; that's all. As for what I done for you, I don't rickerlict but one thing worth mentionin'. I'd ought to a' forgot it long ago, but somehow's it wouldn't lay easy on my mind. I've allers noticed when a thing won't lay easy on the mind the best thing to do 's to git it off. I'm goin' to tell you about it; maybe you-uns can make it out cl'arer than I ever could. I admit it has worried of me some all these years to know if it ware wrong. You ware sech a little chap; no mammy; worse than no daddy. Lookin' at you then, an' at you now, I can't but hope God A'mighty forgives me for that thar lie I told for you."

"For me, Uncle Jube?"

"Yes, son, for you; I don' know as it ware right, an' I ain't goin' to make no brag of it. I'm a' old man, an' I never ware blessed with uncommon learnin'; but I allers tried to keep a fair conscience, an' I have allers set it down as a man's own soul ware his first obligation; an' I never felt obligated to lie fur nobody. But I

tol' the revenuers that thar night you ware my son. They ware huntin' for you."

For a moment Joe could not speak; something rose in his throat and choked him. He turned abruptly away, and walked to the window at the other end of the store.

He understood just what that lie had meant to that "fair conscience!" He understood fully just what it had meant to him, the boy whose life Grim's mean revenge would have ruined. For a moment he could not see the mountain tops that had looked down in grim silence upon his miserable boyhood. Again the old scenes returned. The furnace, glaring like a round, red eye upon the night; the smell of the liquor upon the breath of the distillers, sickening, repulsive. The roar of the cataract, and the call of the screech-owl in the depths of the woods; the weary-boned boy jogging along the uneven roads in the misty morning, astride an equally weary mule. And last, the raid, and that terrible fight, followed by the flight in the darkness; his own fear, and the unspeakable feeling

of horror lest he, too, should be seized and carried away as a law-breaker. He recalled the two terrible pitfalls into which his inexperienced, boyish feet had so nearly stumbled—the raiders first, and afterward the sheriff. And, recalling them, he could trace the rescuing hand of old Jube in both.

He turned to him, where he stood beside the battered counter, his hands lying idly folded within each other, his old face, seamed and saddened by time and sorrow, lifted to the sunlight. Joe took one of the wrinkled hands in his.

"There is but one way," said he, "to make the lie truth, and that is to come home, indeed, to your son."

The old man laughed; he had never thought of that. Yet it moved him; it did seem a reasonable righting of the trouble, after all.

"I'll have to work, Joe," he insisted, when the boy had been sent for the willing buyer in the adjoining county; "I'll have to work. I aim to earn my own salt, as long as the good Lord spar's me."

Later they had their dinner, which Joe insisted upon helping to get.

"I am going to make the coffee in this smoky old pot; oh, but don't I know how! I made it for granny many a time. I stopped at her grave to-day, Uncle Jube, when I went over to speak to Aunt Jane. What are you going to cook the batter bread in? No, sir; you are not going to fry any bacon in that pan. Slap it down there on those live coals. Oh! but this does remind me of granny—"

"I wish't she could see you now, son," said Jube.

"Perhaps she does," said Joe. "I like to think so, anyhow. And, at any rate, she knows what you did for me, Uncle Jube."

The old man looked up from the broiling meat he was lifting from the coals.

"Now, Joe," said he, "you shut that up, else I won't go a foot. I done nothin'; nothin'."

"Yes, you did," said Joe. "You spoke the 'word in season,' and it has, indeed, been to me as apples of gold in pictures of silver."

There was a lull in the conversation; the broiling bacon sputtered and spat and curled itself into rebellious little hoops. The bread in the oven browned to a beautiful golden shade; it was growing late. Visitors would be coming to the store by-and-by.

"Uncle Jube," said Joe, "shall we start home to-night?"

The storekeeper shook his head.

"To-morrow, then?"

"Next day, son; next day.'

"But why? We are—"

A step sounded upon the rotting old planks at the door; the old man leaned forward, and put his lips to Joe's ear:

"Not a word more, son, not a word more. We'll go next day. I want some o' these folks to see you, son. I want 'em to see what the good Lord has raised up for hisse'f out o' the moonshiner's son."

THE END

Comrades True

OR

PERSEVERANCE *vs.* GENIUS

By Edward S. Ellis, A. M.

Author of "Among the Esquimaux," "The Campers Out," etc.

320 Pages Illustrated

Cloth, $1.25

In following the career of two friends from youth to manhood, this popular author weaves a narrative of intense and at times thrilling interest. One of the boys is endowed with brilliant talents, is quick and impulsive, but after a few efforts is easily discouraged. The other possessing only ordinary ability, is resolute and persevering, overcoming all obstacles in his path until success is attained.

This story possesses the usual exciting and interesting experiences that occur in the lives of all bright and active youths. In point of incident it is rather more than ordinarily realistic, as the two heroes in their experiences pass through the recent calamitous forest fires in northern Minnesota, and barely escape with their lives.

The perusal of this story will not only prove fascinating, but its teaching will encourage young men to depend for success in life upon patience and perseverance in right paths, rather than upon great natural gifts, real or fancied.

Sold by all booksellers, or sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price.

The Penn Publishing Company

923 Arch Street, Philadelphia

Among the Esquimaux

OR,

Adventures Under the Arctic Circle

By Edward S. Ellis, A. M.

Author of "The Campers Out," Etc.

317 pages Illustrated

Cloth, $1.25

The incidents of this interesting story are laid in Greenland amid the snows, the glaciers, and the barren regions which have engaged the attention of explorers and navigators for centuries past.

The main interest of the story centres about two bright boys whose desire for discovery sometimes leads them into dangerous positions. They visit an iceberg, and, while making a tour about it, their boat slips away from her moorings. After a number of adventures, they are finally rescued by a native Esquimau. With him and an old sailor who accompanied them them to the iceberg, they go on a hunting expedition into the interior of Greenland, and there they have a number of most thrilling and exciting experiences, but none result seriously, and the whole party is eventually restored to home and friends.

The story is sure to prove interesting to any reader, and the moral tone pervading it is such as will meet the approval of all parents.

Sold by all booksellers, or sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price.

The Penn Publishing Company

923 Arch Street, Philadelphia

The Campers Out

OR

The Right Path and the Wrong

By Edward S. Ellis, A. M.

Author of "Among the Esquimaux," "Comrades True," etc.

363 pages Illustrated

Cloth, $1.25

This is one of the most interesting works of an author whose productions are widely read and deservedly popular on both sides of the Atlantic. Mr. Ellis has in perfection the faculty of making his stories not only entertaining in the highest degree but instructing and elevating. A leading journal truthfully stated that no mother need hesitate to place any story of which Mr. Ellis is the author in the hands of her boy, for he is sure to be instructed as well as entertained.

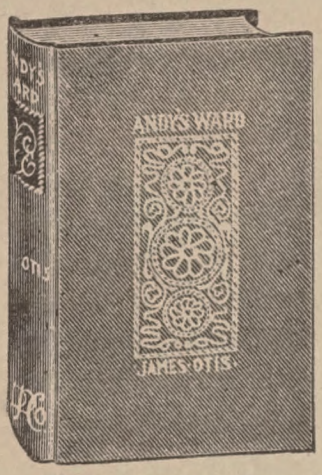
"The Campers Out" is bright, breezy, and full of adventure of just the right sort to hold the attention of any young mind. It is clean, pure, and elevating, and the stirring incidents with which it is filled convey one of the most forceful of morals. It traces the "right path" and the "wrong path" of several boys with such striking power that old and young will be alike impressed by the faithful portrayal of character, and be interested from beginning to end by the succession of exciting incidents.

Sold by all booksellers, or sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price

The Penn Publishing Company

923 Arch Street, Philadelphia

Andy's Ward



OR

THE INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM

By James Otis

Author of "The Braganza Diamond," "Chasing a Yacht," etc.

358 Pages Illustrated

Cloth, $1.25

A peculiarly fascinating narrative of the life and experiences of "Museum Marvels." They dwell in a house owned by a sword-swallower, whose wife, the "Original Circassian," is entrusted with its management. But one of the company, a dwarf, nicknamed the "Major," insists upon taking charge, and the rest of the household, including a fat lady, a giant, and a snake-charmer, stand more in awe of him than of the owner of the house or his wife.

Two boys, Andy and Jerry, are employed to wait upon this queerly assorted family. Their troubles with the dwarf and his pets, during which the boys are aided and counselled by the giant, make up the lighter portion of the story.

A tiny girl, who is even more of a dwarf than the "Major," is introduced to the household by Andy, who claims her as his ward, by virtue of a promise made to her brother when he was dying.

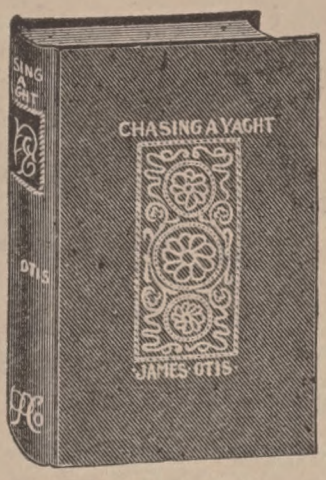
The private life of the marvels, their amusements, their wrangles, especially the laughable encounters between the "Giant" and the "Major," form a most interesting story.

Sold by all booksellers, or sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price.

The Penn Publishing Company

923 Arch Street, Philadelphia

Chasing a Yacht



By James Otis

Author of

"The Braganza Diamond," "Andy's Ward," etc.

350 pages Illustrated

Cloth, $1.25

Two boys have engaged to run a steam yacht for the double purpose of pleasure and profit, and after carefully fitting her up they launch her, only to find the next morning that she is gone—stolen—as they later discover, by two other boys who had been refused a half-interest in her. The rightful owners start in hot pursuit, and in an attempt to recapture the steamer are themselves made prisoners. It is the intention of the thieves to hold the owners prisoners until the Hudson River is reached and then put them ashore, but their plans miscarry owing to the intervention of two rather rough citizens who find their way aboard the yacht and make themselves generally at home. Fortunately one of the owners manages to effect his escape, and gaining the assistance of the authorities the little vessel is speedily restored to them.

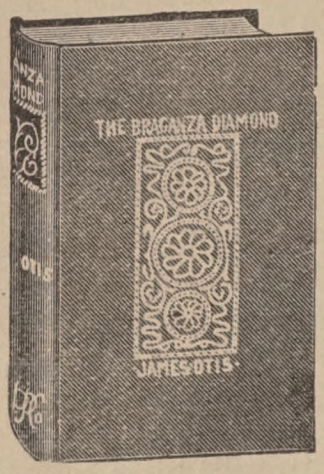
The story is full of adventure, and the heroes are both bright and manly fellows, who make the best of their temporary hardships. The story will be found to enlist the interest at the outset, and to hold it until the last page is turned.

Sold by all booksellers, or sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price.

The Penn Publishing Company

923 Arch Street, Philadelphia

The Braganza Diamond



By James Otis

Author of

"Chasing a Yacht," "Andy's Ward," etc.

383 pages Illustrated

Cloth, $1.25

Long before the opening events of this story the fragments of this celebrated gem are supposed to have been taken from a wreck by an old sea captain, and secreted by him on a lonely island in Roanoke Sound.

This aged captain, now quite feeble, sends for his niece and her daughter. They invite two bright boys to accompany them, and engaging a steam launch the four, in company with the owner—a trusty sailor—set out for the lonely island. Arriving there they are distressed at finding the captain already dead. To add to their discomfort they also discover that the former owners of the diamond have appeared upon the scene. The little party is forcibly made prisoner, and their captors demand that they forthwith produce the precious stone. This, of course, they are unable to do, but discovering among the old captain's effects a curious cryptogram, they are led to hope that its solution may reveal the secret hiding place of the diamond, and thus restore to them their freedom. This theory eventually proves correct, but not until after the party has endured many hardships, and passed through many exciting experiences.

Sold by all booksellers, or sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price.

The Penn Publishing Company

923 Arch Street, Philadelphia

The Moncasket Mystery

AND

How Tom Hardy Solved It

By Sidney Marlow

375 pages Illustrated

Cloth, $1.25

The tone of this book is earnestly and emphatically moral, and the author understands that nothiug makes morality so attractive to youth as to find it coupled with ingenuity, energy, and pluck.

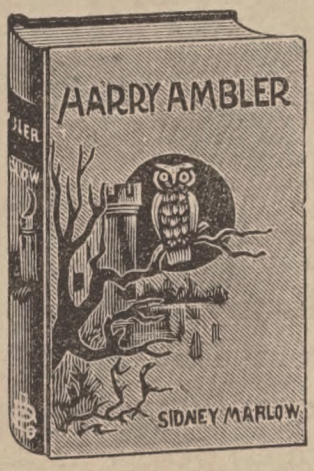
There is no "cant" and no "can't" about Tom Hardy, the decidedly vigorous hero of this story. He is a safe and worthy companion of any boy or girl, and it is predicted that he will not only win a warm place for himself in the hearts of all who make his acquaintance, but that he will gallantly retain it long after the covers shall have closed upon this chronicle of his efforts and adventures. He is an admirable boy, yet the author, in defiance of the usual method in modern juvenile fiction, has refused to sacrifice all of the other characters to the single hero. Even those whose parts are but the slightest have been so attractively presented that the reader feels that if the events had chanced to require it each one of them would have become a hero.

Sold by all booksellers, or sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price.

The Penn Publishing Company

923 Arch Street, Philadelphia

Harry Ambler, and How He Saved the Homestead



By Sidney Marlow

350 Pages Illustrated

Cloth, $1.25

This is a narrative of a bright, active, and courageous boy, suddenly thrown upon his own resources and subjected to the malicious plots of a powerful enemy. The effectual and yet not unnatural manner in which the hero turns his enemy's weapons to his own defence, constitutes, perhaps, the chief charm of the book.

The story abounds in humorous and exciting situations, yet it is in no objectionable way sensational. There is nothing in it that will tend to create or encourage a taste for mere reckless adventure.

The author has given more attention to the delineation of his characters than is usual in juvenile literature, thus making the story pleasant reading, even for those who have passed the outer line of boyhood.

He believes in a "moral," but not in those bits of abstract virtue which are so frequently forced into juvenile stories, only to be "skipped" by the youthful reader. He would create a personal sympathy with the best efforts of fallible boys and girls, rather than an admiration for the mere name of virtue.

Sold by all booksellers, or sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price.

The Penn Publishing Company

923 Arch Street, Philadelphia

The Story of the Iliad

FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

By Dr. Edward Brooks, A. M.

370 pages Profusely Illustrated

Cloth Binding, $1.25

This is a story of absorbing interest both to young and old. It relates in a simple prose narrative the leading incidents of one of the greatest literary works of the world—the Iliad of Homer. Many of its names are household words among educated people, and its incidents are a constant source of allusion and illustration among the best speakers and writers. No one with any claim to literary culture can afford to be ignorant of them.

The object of the work is two-fold—first, to present to young people an interesting story which will be read with pleasure and at the same time cultivate a taste for good literature; second, to give a popular knowledge of this famous work of Homer and thus afford a sort of stepping-stone to one of the grandest poetical structures of all time.

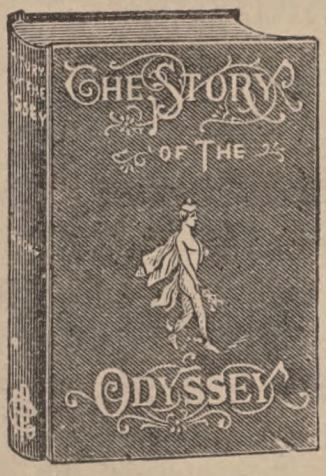
It is thus a book for the home circle, and should be in every household in the land. It is recommended especially for School Libraries and young folks' Reading Circles, and also to schools as a Supplementary Reader.

Sold by all booksellers, or sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price.

The Penn Publishing Company

923 Arch Street, Philadelphia

The Story of the Odyssey



FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

By Dr. Edward Brooks, A. M.

370 pages Profusely Illustrated

Cloth Binding, $1.25

White and Silver Edition, $1.50

The Odyssey of Homer combines the romance of travel with that of domestic life, and it differs from the Iliad, which is a tale of the camp and battle-field. Although the ancient author concentrates the attention on a single character—Ulysses—he refers to several beautiful women, including some of the goddesses. After the siege of Troy, Ulysses started on a voyage of discovery and adventure in unknown lands, which, although described with poetic exaggeration, "has been a rich mine of wealth for poets and romancers, painters and sculptors, from the date of the age which we call Homer's down to our own."

In this wonderful poem lie the germs of thousands of volumes which fill our modern libraries. Without some knowledge of it, readers will miss the point of many things in modern art and literature.

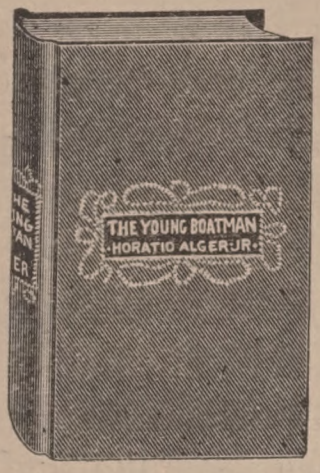
Ulysses was brave and valiant as a soldier, and was distinguished for his wisdom and shrewdness which enabled him to extricate himself from the difficulties which to others would seem insurmountable.

Sold by all booksellers, or sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price.

The Penn Publishing Company

923 Arch Street, Philadelphia

The Young Boatman



By Horatio Alger, Jr.

369 Pages Illustrated

Cloth, $1.25

This is an interesting story of a boy who is obliged to support himself and his mother by rowing passengers across the Kennebec River. To add to his trials, his intemperate stepfather, after serving a term of imprisonment, returns home and endeavors to compel the boy to pay over his small earnings to him. This the boy, who was appropriately nicknamed Grit, refuses to do, and after a struggle the stepfather retires from the conflict and returns to his thieving habits.

Shortly after Grit discovers a conspiracy to rob the bank and promptly communicates his knowledge to the president, who succeeds in frustrating the plans of the robbers and secures their arrest.

Grit's cheerful manner and kindly good nature, coupled with the most sterling honesty, cause him to be held in high esteem by all who know him. His manly courage and self-reliance are often sorely tested, but his indomitable pluck transmutes calamity into success.

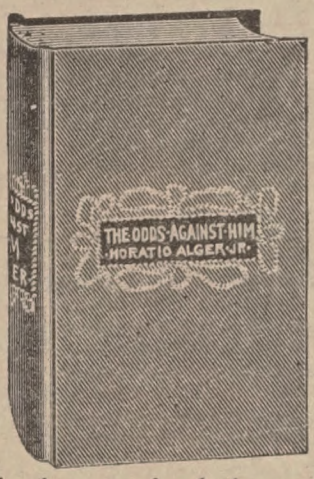
The book is full of incident and adventure of just the right sort to hold the attention of any bright boy.

Sold by all booksellers, or sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price.

The Penn Publishing Company

923 Arch Street, Philadelphia

The Odds Against Him, or Carl Crawford's Experience



By Horatio Alger, Jr.

350 pages Illustrated

Cloth, $1.25

The hero of this story had to leave home on account of the ill-treatment he received from his stepmother, who had a son of her own about the same age. Dr. Crawford, a man of considerable wealth, but of weak, vacillating mind, loved his son, but was afraid to show his true feelings in the presence of his wife. After leaving home and meeting with a number of adverse experiences, Carl eventually obtained employment in a factory. He soon gained the confidence of his employer, and after frustrating an attempt of the book-keeper to rob the safe, he was appointed as a traveler, and, visiting Chicago, he discovered that his stepmother had another husband living. Her success in getting a will made in her own favor, an attempt on the life of her husband, etc., are all defeated, and Carl came out victorious in the end.

The book is full of bright, cheerful, and amusing incidents, showing that a boy of good, honest, sterling, industrious habits can always secure friends, and succeed in earning a good living.

Sold by all booksellers, or sent, prepaid, upon receipt of price.

The Penn Publishing Company

923 Arch Street, Philadelphia

LBJa'15

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

00021974298